

BBC

150<sup>TH</sup>

\*\*\* ANNIVERSARY EDITION \*\*\*

# THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR STORY

FROM THE MAKERS OF *BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE*



**The causes, key events and legacy of this landmark conflict,  
as told by the world's leading experts**

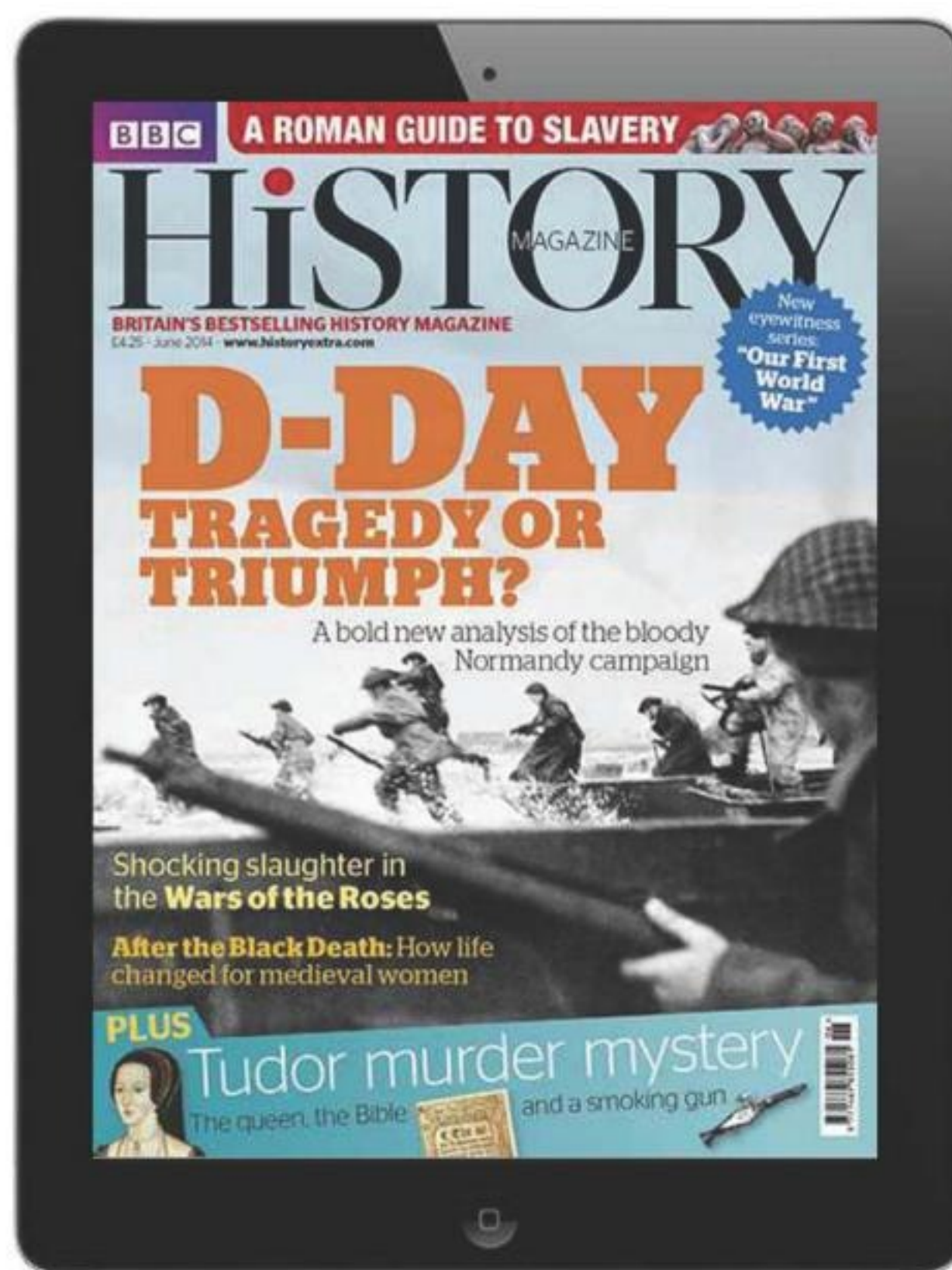


# BBC History Magazine is now available on iPad



You can now read all the great content from Britain's bestselling history magazine on your iPad – combining our printed editions with the pick of our digital offerings.

A **12-month subscription** to the *BBC History Magazine* iPad edition is just £37.99, while a **six-month subscription** will cost you just £18.99. **Single issues** can also be purchased for £3.99 each.



**BBC** **HiSTORY**  
MAGAZINE

Search: BBC History



Available on the  
**App Store**



# WELCOME



ONE HUNDRED AND fifty years ago this July, Union and Confederate armies clashed close to the Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg. Although few realised it at the time, this three-day battle – a Union victory – was to become a defining moment of the American Civil War.

“The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here,” declared Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg address, “but it can never forget what they did here”. He may have been wrong on the first count but he was indisputably correct on the second. Gettysburg, and the American Civil War as a whole, continue to loom large in history, not only in the United States, but in the world at large. For, as James M McPherson writes on page 98, “the

international consequences of a divided America in two world wars and the Cold War are incalculable”.

On the 150th anniversary of Gettysburg, we at *BBC History Magazine* have created this American Civil War special edition, bringing together a group of leading American and British historians to tell the story of the conflict in a fresh, compelling manner. Over the pages that follow you will discover the key events and personalities that shaped the course of the war and also get a feel for what it was like to be a foreign mercenary, a southern widow or a wounded veteran during these turbulent years. I hope you find it a stimulating read.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Rob Attar'.

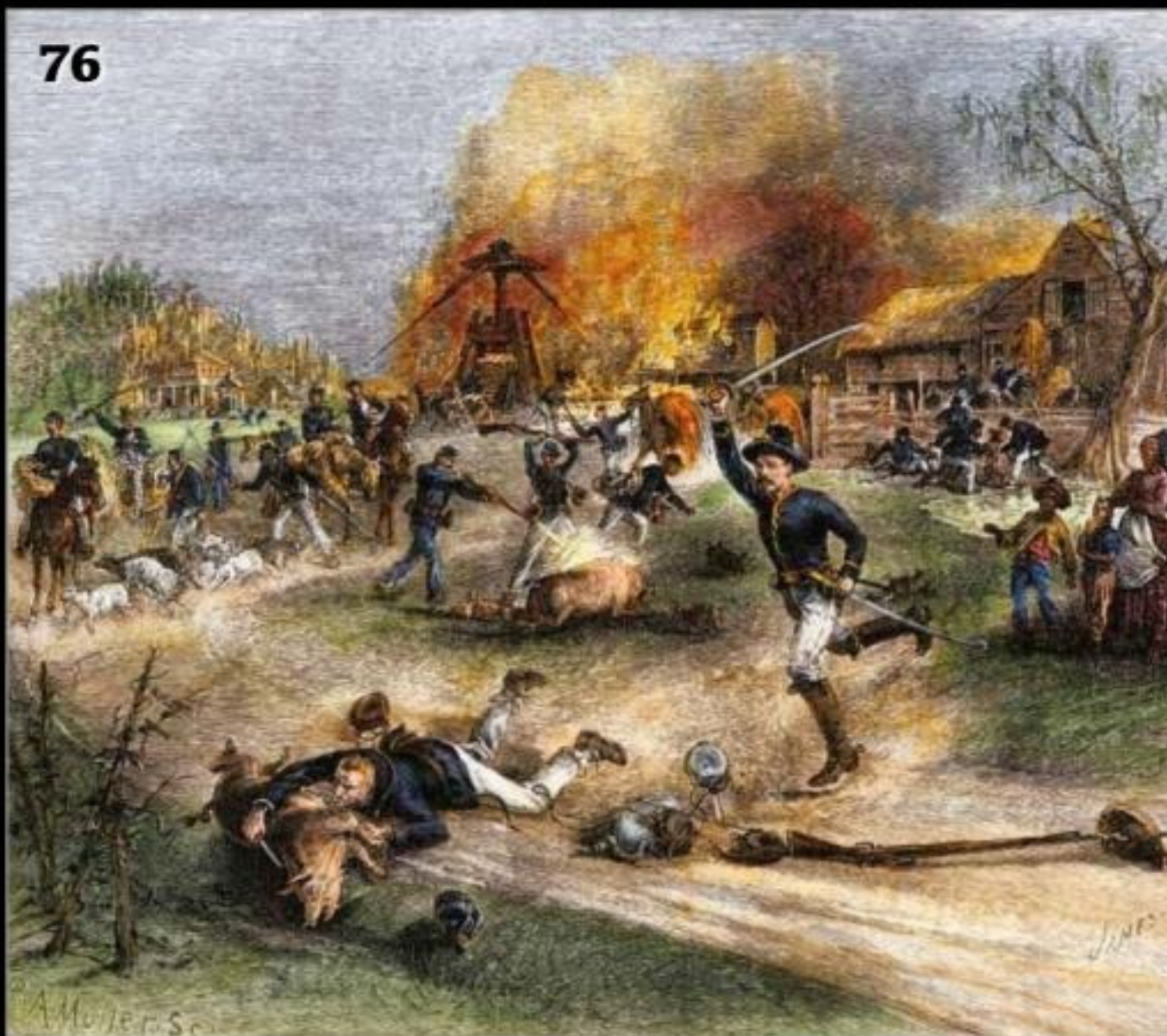
**Rob Attar**  
Editor



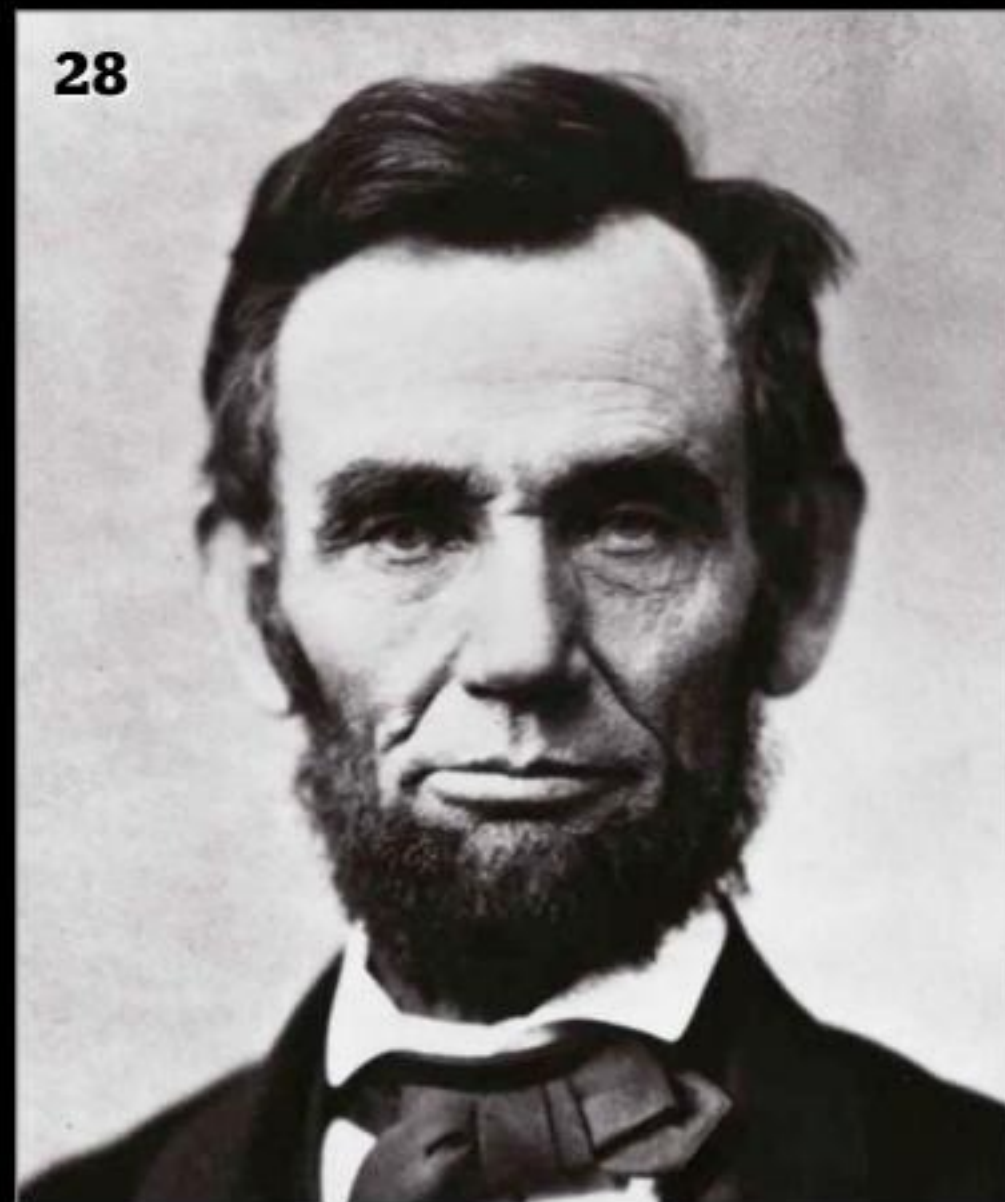
On the anniversary of the civil war, we look back at the bloodiest conflict ever fought on US soil



76



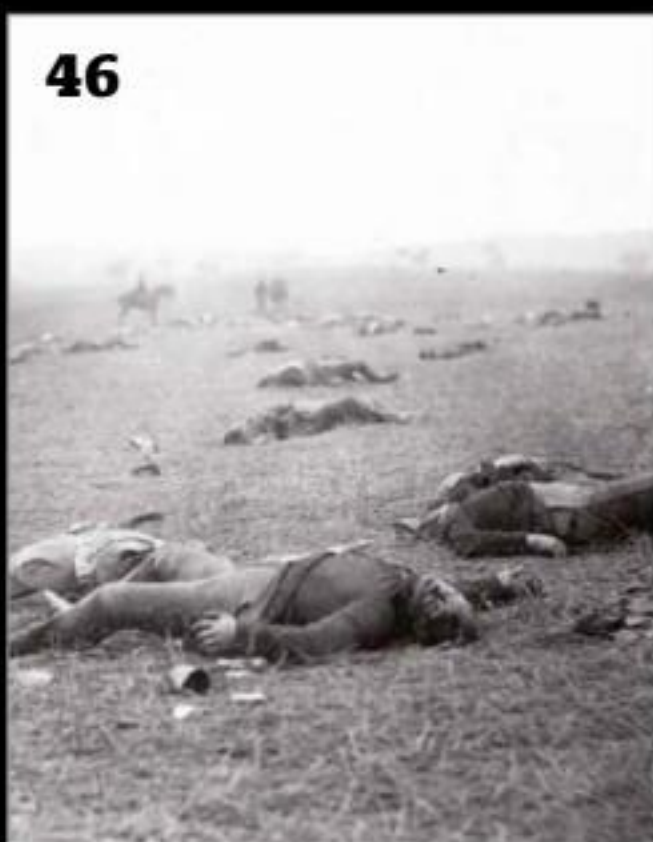
28



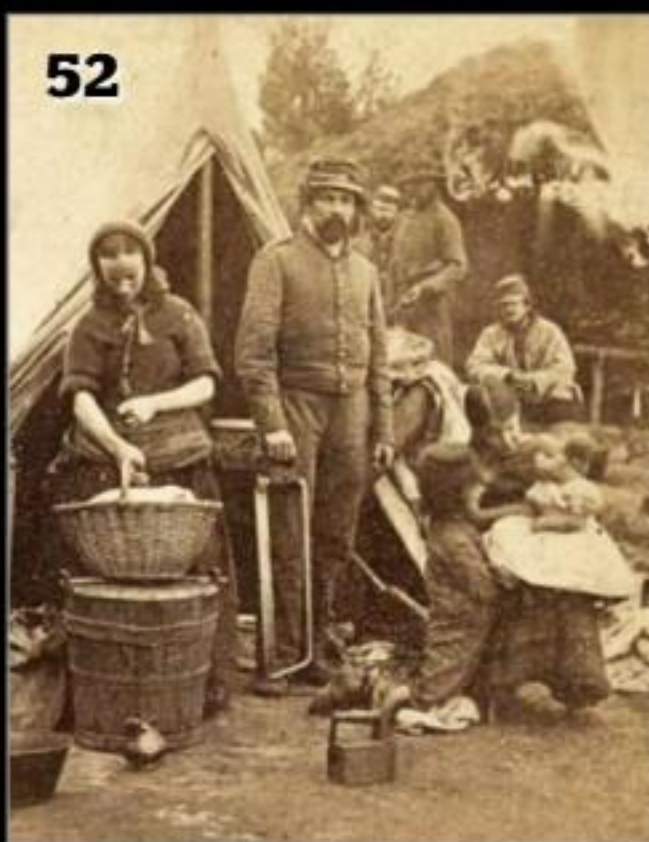
56



46



52



20



ALAMY X2, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X3, AKG IMAGES



# CONTENTS

## 8 The story of the war: part 1

Adam Smith charts rising tensions between North and South since independence

## 14 With god on their side

The war was as much about religion as slavery, argues David Goldfield

## 20 A life in chains

When the civil war broke out, four million people lived in slavery in America. Gervase Phillips considers what their lives were like

## 24 Why people fought: The South

Whatever their individual motivations, Confederates were united in defending a slave-based society, says Richard Carwardine

## 26 Why people fought: The North

Northerners saw American mass democracy as a system of government that had to be defended, explains Richard Carwardine

## 28 Lincoln: man on a mission

Richard Carwardine asks why the president was so determined to preserve the Union

## 32 The story of the war: part 2

Adam IP Smith outlines the events of 1861–63, from shocking casualties at Bull Run to Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg

## 38 When war came calling

With most of the battles fought on southern soil, David Anderson explains how deep the impact of the war was on Confederate civilians

## 42 Drawn to America

Amanda Foreman introduces us to the immigrants who took sides in the American Civil War – and altered their own lives forever

## 46 The civil war in photos

Mike Musick explores the significance of nine key images from the conflict

## 52 Women and the civil war

Nurses, spies and soldiers: women's roles in the war were many, says Catherine Clinton

## 56 The battle of Gettysburg

Brian Holden Reid explains why the infamous battle wasn't just a disastrous mistake by the South – it was the beginning of the end for the Confederacy

## 62 Generals in command

Terry L Jones outlines the achievements and failings of the key commanders

## 66 How naval power shaped the war

Naval historian Andrew Lambert explores the role of encounters on rivers and seas

## 70 The story of the war: part 3

Adam IP Smith focuses on the final years of conflict, when the North waged all-out war with the South

## 76 The sack of the South

When General Sherman marched his troops through the south, he destroyed its morale and its ability to wage war

## 80 A battle of wills

Why did the South lose? It wasn't, as General Robert E Lee thought, simply overwhelmed by superior forces, argues Adam Smith

## 82 The price of freedom

With the start of the war, escaping slaves fled to Union lines. But, as Jim Downs reveals, that often wasn't the end of their troubles

## 86 Help for heroes

Many soldiers returning from the war faced hardship, explains Susan-Mary Grant

## 88 The reconstruction of America: after the war

Heather Cox Richardson reveals how divided Americans managed to rebuild their nation after the war

## 92 The civil war trail

Follow Aaron Astor's itinerary to visit the key battlesites and war memorials

## 98 The legacy of the war

The consequences of the civil war are still resonant today, argues James M McPherson

# IMMEDIATE MEDIA<sup>CO</sup>

The American Civil War Story from the makers of BBC History Magazine is published by Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited under licence from BBC Worldwide.

BBC History Magazine was established to publish authoritative history, written by leading experts, in an accessible and attractive format. We seek to maintain the high journalistic standards traditionally associated with the BBC.

The American Civil War Story  
is produced by  
BBC History Magazine

**history**

### CONTACT US

#### WEBSITE

[www.historyextra.com](http://www.historyextra.com)

#### PHONE

Editorial +44 (0)117 314 7377

Subscriptions & back issues

UK – 0844 844 0250

US – 800 342 3592 (toll-free)

Those with impaired hearing can call  
Minicom +44 (0)1795 414561

#### EMAIL

Editorial [historymagazine@historyextra.com](mailto:historymagazine@historyextra.com)

Subscriptions & back issues

UK – [bbchistorymag@servicehelpline.co.uk](mailto:bbchistorymag@servicehelpline.co.uk)

US – [history@magcs.com](mailto:history@magcs.com)

#### POST

Editorial BBC History Magazine, Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN, UK

### EDITORIAL

Editor Rob Attar

[robertattar@historyextra.com](mailto:robertattar@historyextra.com)

Managing editor Paul McGuinness

Production editor Mel Woodward

Art editor Sheu-Kuie Ho

Picture editors James Cutmore, Sam Nott

Contributors Paul Bloomfield, Rob Williams, Sue Wingrove, Jonathan Wright

### ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Advertising director Caroline Herbert

Senior advertising manager Laura Gibbs

Account manager Sam Jones +44 (0)117 314 8847

Marketing co-ordinator Gemma Burns

### PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Press officer Carolyn Wray +44 (0)117 314 8812

[carolyn.wray@immediate.co.uk](mailto:carolyn.wray@immediate.co.uk)

### SYNDICATION

Head of licensing & syndication Joanna Alexandre

Magazine syndication executive Simon Goodman

### PRODUCTION

Production director Sarah Powell

Production co-ordinator Emily Mounter

Reprographics Tony Hunt and Chris Sutch

### IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY

Associate publisher David Musgrove

Publishing director Andy Healy

Managing director Andy Marshall

CEO Tom Bureau

Deputy Chairman Peter Phippen

Chairman Stephen Alexander

### BBC WORLDWIDE MAGAZINES UNIT

Managing director Nicholas Brett

Publishing director James Hewes

Editorial director Jenny Potter

Unit co-ordinator Eva Abramik

© Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited

Not for resale. All rights reserved. Unauthorised reproduction in whole or part is prohibited without written permission. Every effort has been made to secure permission for copyright material. In the event of any material being used inadvertently, or where it proved impossible to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.



## 2 Subscription offer

Are you passionate about history? Here's a great subscription offer to BBC History Magazine





## On the eve of war

### The American states in 1861

The American Civil War broke out between free states in the north of the Union (where slavery was prohibited) and slave states in the south. The latter seceded from the Union early in 1861 to form the Confederacy, with a capital at Richmond, Virginia. The war would largely be fought in the southern states. Four border states did not secede, although they did have slavery: Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri. West Virginia, which split from Virginia over the issue of secession, was also considered a border state.

- Free states at the outbreak of war
- Slave state at the outbreak of war
- Territories
- Union and Confederate boundary
- X
 Site of key battle







# ... PART ONE ...

## THE STORY OF THE WAR

With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, 13 former British colonies became the United States of America, but by the 1830s it was clear the new nation was divided. **Adam IP Smith** explains how the issue of slavery, above all, created discord between north and south, and forced political tension to rise



**Cotton riches** Slaves use a cotton gin to separate cotton fibres from seeds. Growing the crop was lucrative, leading to a rise in slavery in southern states

### 1 The cause of the trouble: slavery

AT THE TIME of the American revolution, it was legal to hold human beings as 'property' in all the British colonies that rebelled. But in the wake of the revolution, slavery was abolished in New England and, gradually, in the mid-Atlantic states as well. In the south though, where most enslaved people were held, abolitionism stalled and slavery expanded rapidly. Between the revolution and 1860, the slave population increased from 700,000 to nearly 4 million, geographically concentrated in the south. The

increase was driven by the profits to be made from the sale of raw cotton – and to a lesser extent sugar, rice and tobacco – on world markets.

As Abraham Lincoln was later to say, "all knew" that "somehow" slavery was the cause of the war. This is not the same as claiming that northerners and southerners went to war in 1861 with the desire to attack or defend slavery as a prime motivation: most did not. However, it became increasingly difficult to sustain a nation divided, "half slave and half free" in Lincoln's phrase.

Americans in 1861 had much in common with one another: a reverence for the Founding Fathers and a shared belief in freedom, opportunity and providential God. Most people, both north and south, worked on the land; almost all white folk assumed racial superiority, whatever their views on slavery. However, slavery shaped the south in ways that made the north see it as a threatening and alien society, just as northern attacks on slavery pushed southerners to see Yankees as their enemies.

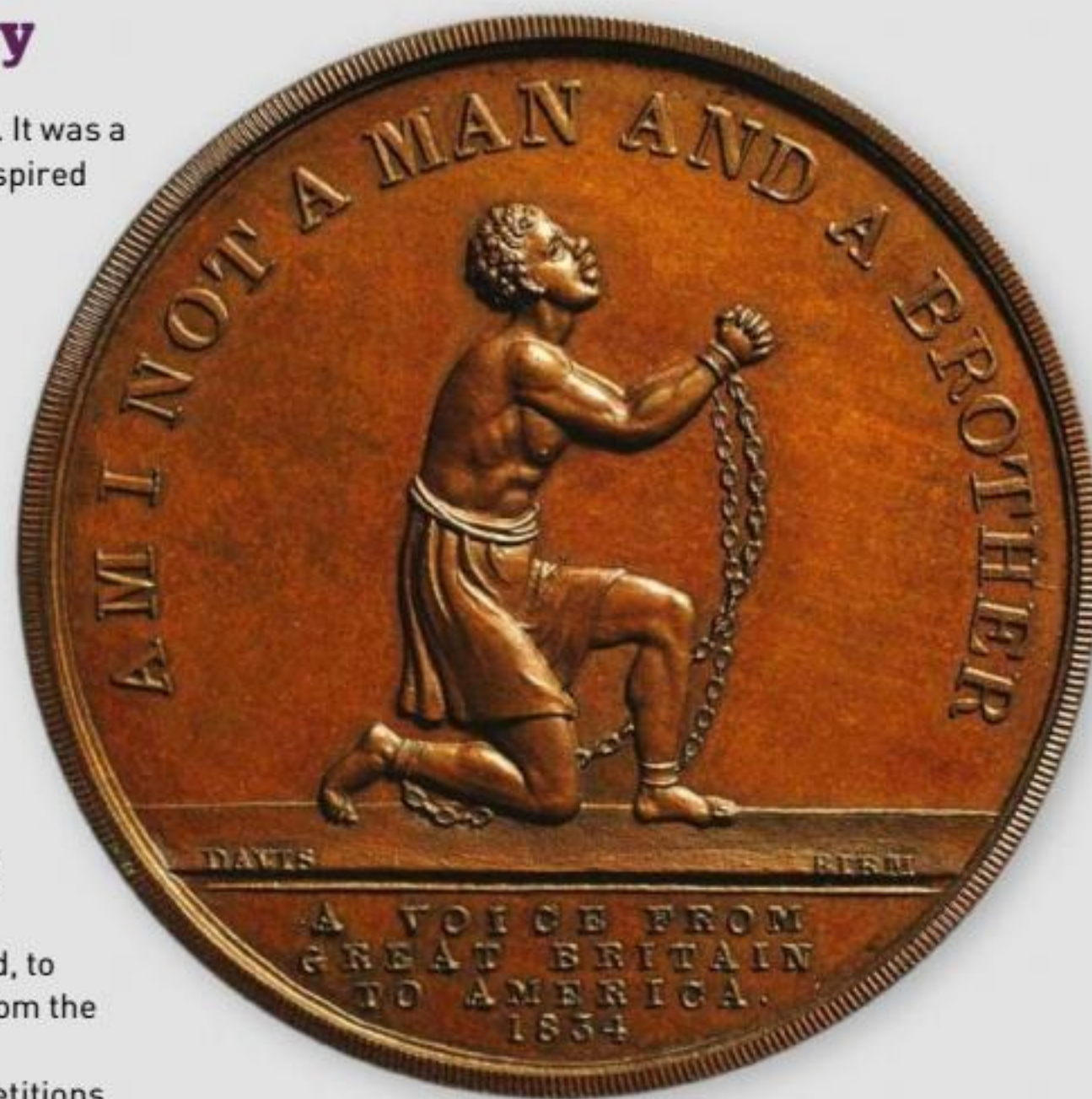


## 2 Abolitionism versus proslavery

SLAVERY WAS A capitalist institution: it depended on 'owners' being able to buy, sell and invest in human beings. That in turn required confidence on the part of buyers that their 'property' would be protected and recognised. This was why the rising antislavery movement, with campaigners' core claim that human beings could never be turned into mere property, was so threatening to slaveholders. Unlike other moral issues that enter politics, abolitionism threatened billions of dollars of investments. Most Americans in both sections shared the common aspiration of property ownership and believed they lived in an open, free society where hard work was rewarded. The difference was that most southerners were comfortable with the idea that black people were just another type of property.

In the 1830s, the abolitionist movement grew into a loud, if

minority, force in the north. It was a transatlantic movement inspired by abolition in the British Empire, powered by evangelical fervour and horror at the human cost of slavery, not least in terms of the destruction of family life and the violation of women. From the 1830s onwards, the open discussion of emancipation in the south became impossible. Slaveholders needed the free states to recognise the legitimacy of their slave property. They tried, and briefly succeeded, to ban antislavery material from the US mail and to prevent the discussion of antislavery petitions in congress. They were caught in a cycle whereby, as more and more people denounced slavery, they needed ever-greater reassurances.



### End of a cruel era

As this medal commemorates, the Abolition Act heralded the end of slavery within the British Empire on 1 August 1834

## 3 The Mexican War breaks out

IN 1846, PRESIDENT James K Polk, a Democrat and a slaveholder, used a border dispute as a pretext to invade Mexico. Southerners were excited by the prospect of acquiring new slave territory but many northerners supported the war as well, assuming that it was the destiny of whites to settle the entire continent. The Mexican War was probably the most successful war of imperial expansion in modern history: a decisive and relatively low-cost victory for the USA that led, in 1848, to the annexation of the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico as well as parts of Texas and Colorado.

However, the war also set the nation on a collision course over slavery. Very few northerners were out-and-out abolitionists but most, it turned out, were against the expansion of slavery into these new territories in the west. Increasing numbers of northerners believed that if the new territories were



### Expansion by force A depiction of the Battle of Buena Vista (1847), a decisive victory for US forces

allowed to become a 'vast slave empire' then the character of the nation would be changed forever, and the 'right to rise' for the honest white working man would be sacrificed in the interest of a slaveholding class. Free white men did not want to have to compete for land with privileged slaveholders. Nor did they want to

end up competing as labourers against black slaves.

In the end, a compromise was struck: California was admitted as a free state (just as the Gold Rush made it a magnet) but most of the rest of the former Mexican land was opened to the possibility of slavery, should the local settlers so desire it.



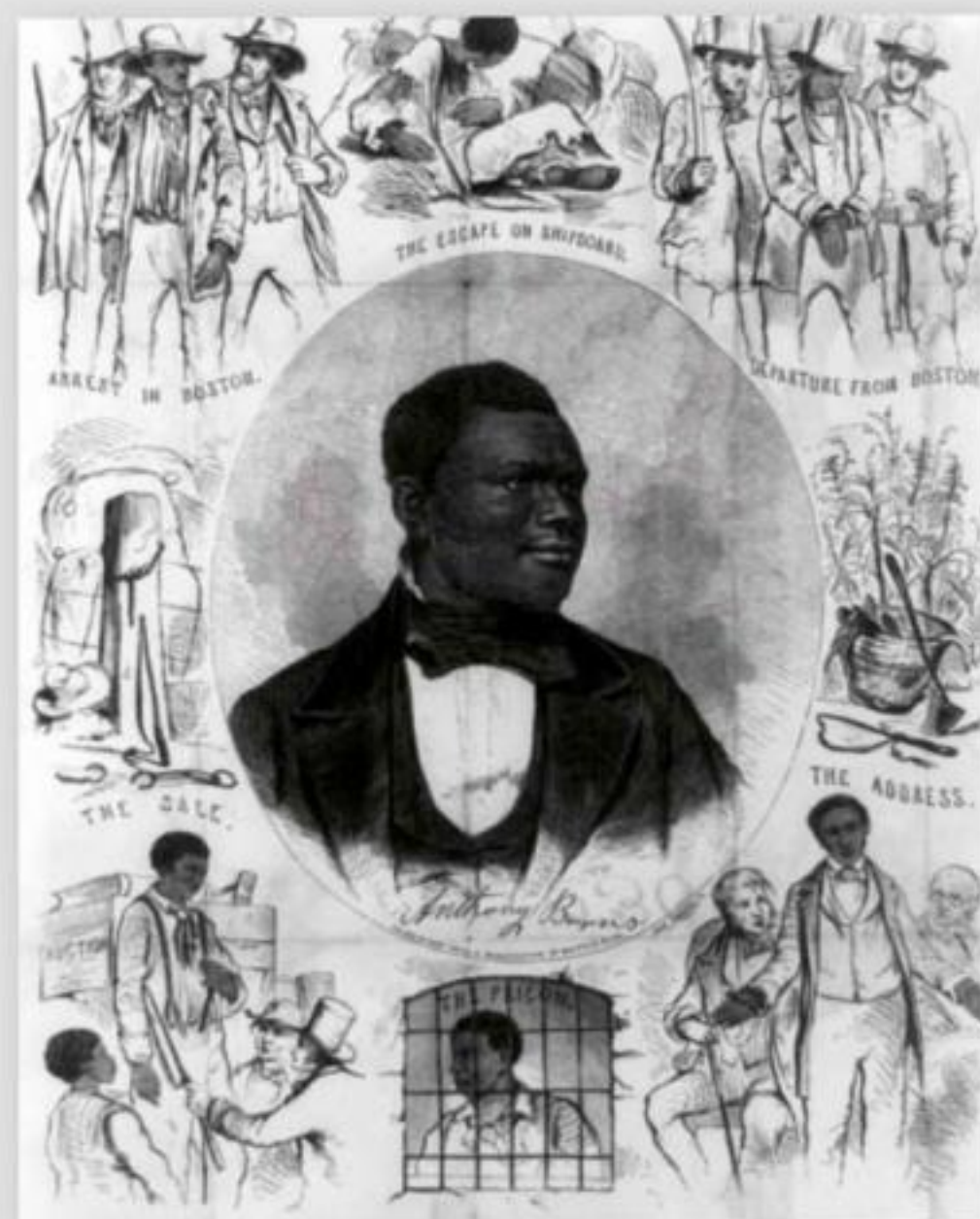
## 4 The Fugitive Slave Act 1850

AMONG THE REASSURANCES demanded by southerners was a new Fugitive Slave Act, passed by Congress in 1850 against northern opposition, which aimed to make it easier for slaveholders to reclaim runaway 'property' in the free states. Ironically in view of southerners' later protestations about states' rights, the act led to a massive expansion of the federal government, giving it the right to override northern states' law-enforcement procedures.

Southerners saw the law as a test of how far the north was prepared to accommodate what they called their 'peculiar institution'. "Respect and enforce the Fugitive Slave Law as it stands," one proslavery editor warned the north. "If not, WE WILL LEAVE YOU!" By demanding that freemen

be shackled and returned to slavery against the wishes of the local community, the Fugitive Slave Act made a formerly abstract issue frighteningly real.

A number of high-profile cases of allegedly runaway slaves being returned to bondage electrified the north. In 1854, thousands of Bostonians shouting "shame!" and "kidnappers!" watched in horror as Anthony Burns, a black man who had been living as a freeman in the city, was marched in chains by federal troops to the wharveside to be taken back south into slavery. This was the backdrop to the phenomenal popularity of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a grim depiction of the harshness of plantation life that further raised northerners' awareness of slavery.



**Cause célèbre** After he was sent south, abolitionists fought a long campaign to free Anthony Burns (1834–62) from captivity



### Racking up the tension

In formally creating the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to aid railway expansion, and simultaneously lifting a ban on slavery in the region, Congress heightened tensions between north and south. Proslavery elements and abolitionists flooded into Kansas, leading to local skirmishes, and **Bleeding Kansas, or the Border War**, was a presage to further conflict

## 5 Kansas-Nebraska Act 1854

DID RAILROADS HELP cause the civil war? It was the desire to build a railroad to California that led Congress in 1854 to organise land to the west of Illinois, creating the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. This was land that had been part of the United States for half a century but had been barely settled by European Americans, and from which slavery had been banned under the terms of the Missouri Compromise in 1820.

Southerners in Congress only supported the bill once the prohibition on slavery was lifted. To millions of northerners, including many who had never previously considered themselves antislavery, this was a betrayal of a sacred promise that the lands of Kansas and Nebraska would be open to the free settlement of poor white men. More than that, it seemed to be evidence that the government was in the hands of sinister and 'aristocratic' proslavery interests.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was the single most important catalyst for the rise of a new political party, the Republican Party, which presented itself as the only true defender of northern interests against the aggressions of the south. 'The North is discovered!' was one of many Republican campaign songs. If the party could unite the northern states, it could capture enough Electoral College votes to win the presidency even without having any support at all in the south. It didn't manage this in 1856. Hapless Pennsylvania Democrat James Buchanan won instead. But in the coming few years, the new party built support further as the south demanded even greater protection for its slave 'property'.



## 6 The Rise of Abraham Lincoln

ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS born in 1809 in a log cabin in what was then the frontier state of Kentucky. Despite having virtually no formal education, Lincoln made his own way in life, shrugging off his subsistence-farming background and the whiskey-soaked roughness that went with it. He became a leading lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, and with a keen interest in politics, he also became a prominent state politician, arguing for transportation improvements and secure banks.

After one term in Congress in the late 1840s, his political career appeared to be over. But like many others, he thought the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a challenge that had to be faced. In a speech given at Peoria, Illinois, in 1854, Lincoln expressed the shame and anger so many northerners felt at the potential expansion of slavery. "Our republican robe is soiled and trailed in the dust," he declared. "Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood of the revolution."

Although Lincoln repeatedly said that he disapproved of slavery as a violation of the rights of men to the fruits of their labour, he was not an abolitionist and he revered the American Constitution, even though it protected slavery within states that allowed it. But while he did not advocate the immediate overthrow of slavery, he said again and again that it should be placed "on the path to ultimate extinction". In Lincoln's view, the United States would become either a slave nation or a modern free-labour nation. For the future president, the time had come to be clear about the final destination.



**Humble roots** Abraham Lincoln, pictured here with his son Tad (Thomas) in February 1865, rose from obscurity to lead the North through the American Civil War

## 7 John Brown's raid of 1859

IN OCTOBER 1859, the messianic abolitionist John Brown launched an amateurish raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His aim was to distribute the arms among local slaves and spark a general insurrection. Brown was quickly apprehended by US troops under the command of Colonel Robert E Lee.

Brown's raid struck southern society at its weakest point, but shocking as it was for white southerners that violence had been used on their home soil, the most frightening aspect of the affair was the northern response. While most mainstream politicians, including Republican leaders, condemned Brown's acts, there was also admiration for his bravery. In



**Course of attack** Brown led his raiders to Harpers Ferry, Virginia, with the aim of seizing the armoury

antislavery strongholds, including Massachusetts, supporters raised funds for Brown's legal defence and to help his family.

Brown played the part of martyr to perfection. Republican newspapers reported his well-aimed final words as he was led to the gallows: "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes

of this guilty land will never be purged away – but with blood." Brown's raid reinforced southerners' conception of themselves as victims. One Virginia newspaper concluded: "Thousands of men who, a month ago, scoffed at the idea of a dissolution of the Union... now hold the opinion that its days are numbered."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X4, ALAMY

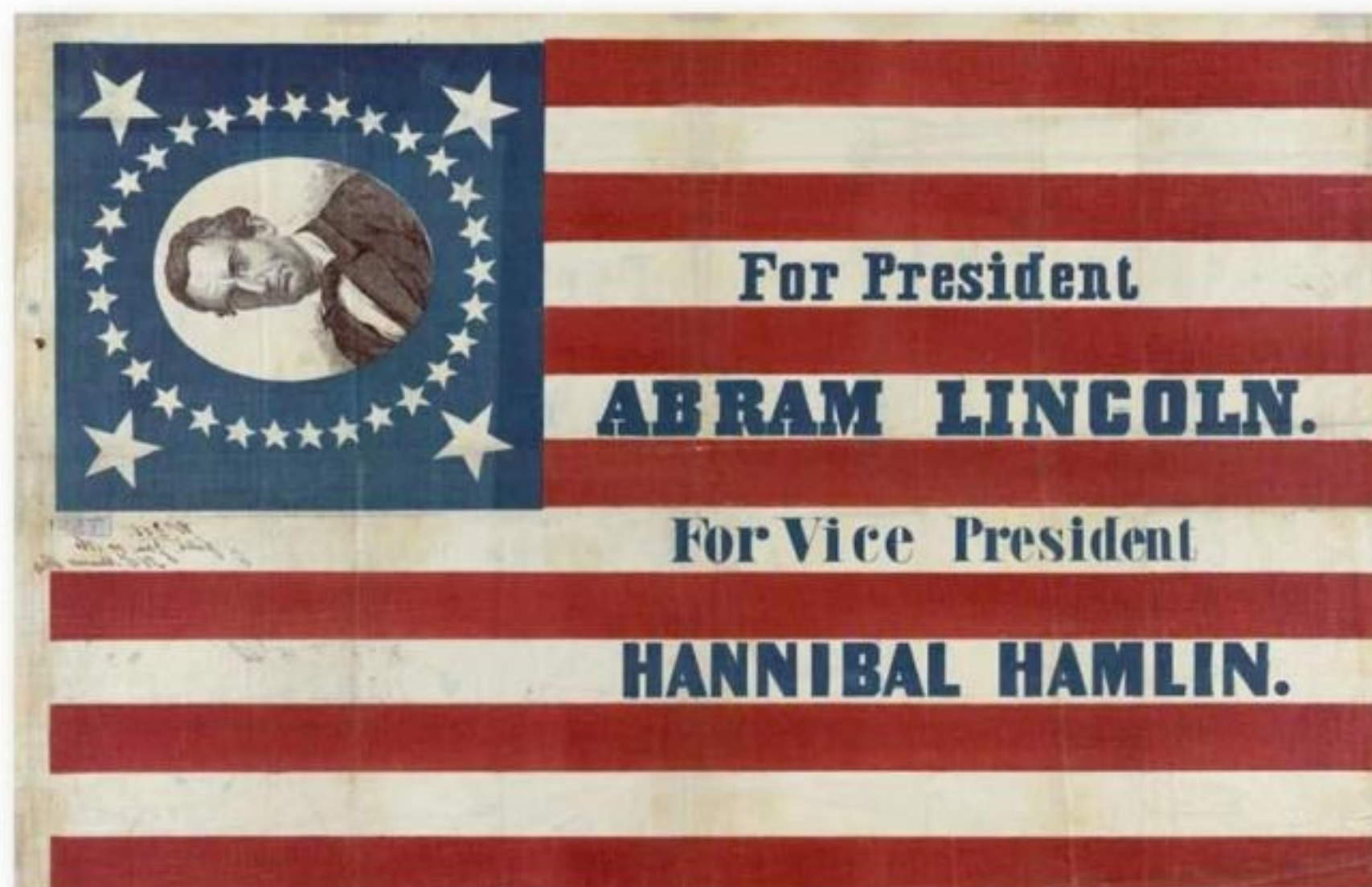


## 8 The 1860 election

THE TRIGGER FOR secession was the election of the Republican presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln in November 1860. It was, in effect, two parallel elections, one in each section. The Democratic Party split, with one Democrat, Stephen A Douglas, fighting Lincoln in the free states, while another, John C Breckinridge, fought for the votes of slave states against a more moderate third-party opponent. Lincoln won only 40 per cent of the national popular vote, but by winning almost all of the free states, he comfortably carried the Electoral College.

Antislavery men welcomed Lincoln's election as a decisive break with the past. The patrician Bostonian Charles Francis Adams was elated that "the great revolution has actually taken place" and that "the country has once and for all thrown off the domination of the slaveholders".

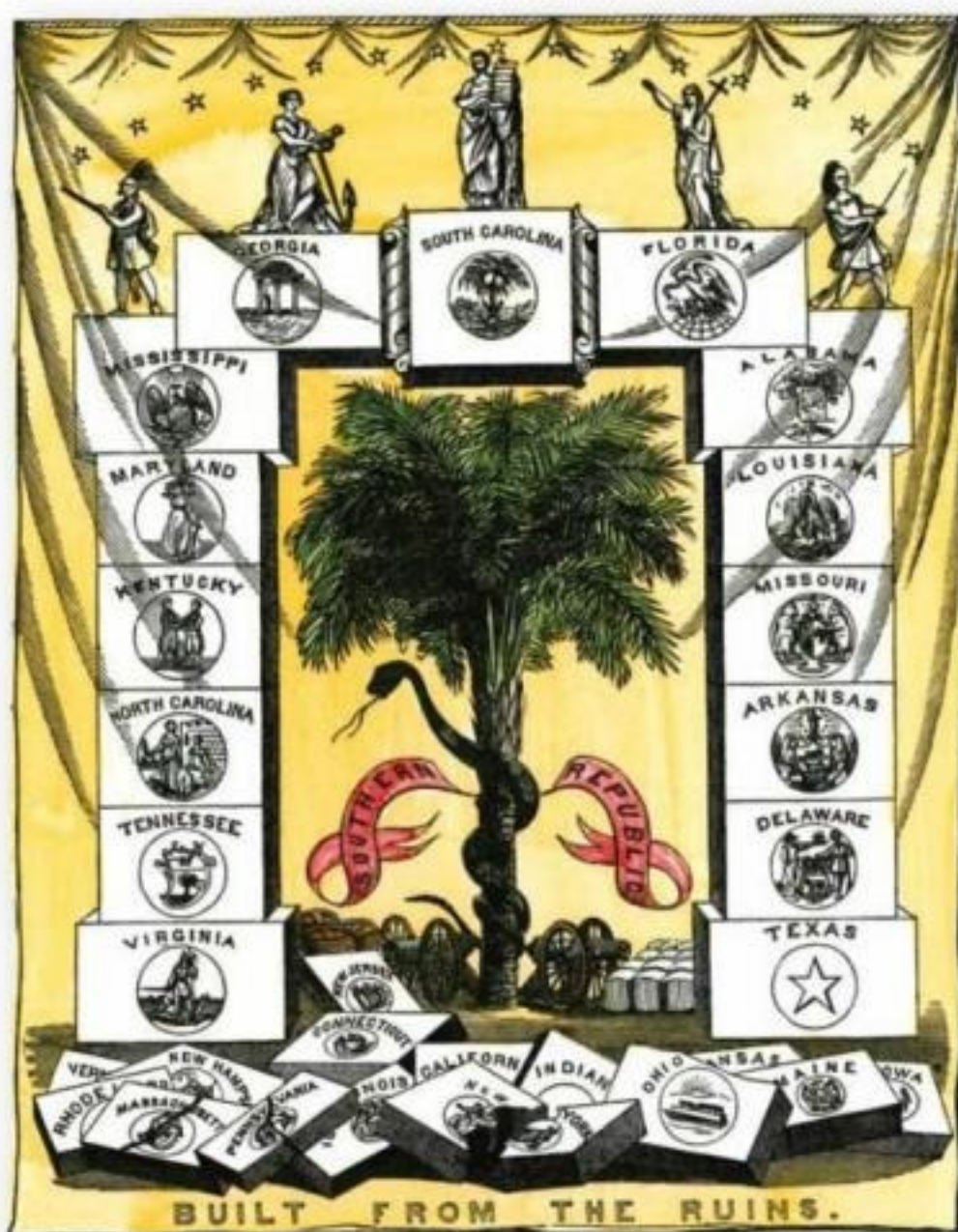
In southern states, the so-called 'fire eaters', who had been campaigning for secession for



**Campaign fervour** Lincoln's name was abbreviated to create this eye-catching promotional banner

years, appeared to have been prescient. Lincoln, like the rest of his party, believed slavery was wrong. To the leaders of southern society, this was enough for them to believe that the federal government had fallen into the hands of people who were their enemies.

Irrevocably so, since the rising population of the free states meant their Electoral College advantage would only increase and leave the south politically impotent. "The election of Lincoln," wrote one southern politician, "has placed our necks under their heels."



**New allegiance** A celebration of the Confederacy. In fact, not all the states named here seceded. Maryland, for instance, didn't formally take either side and was placed under martial law

## 9 Southern states secede from the Union

TO NO-ONE'S SURPRISE, South Carolina, long the most radical proslavery region of the southern states, was the first to announce it was leaving the Federal Union, on 20 December 1860. The resolutions adopted that day made it explicit that the motive was the protection of slavery. South Carolina secessionists condemned the free states for denouncing "as sinful the institution of Slavery".

Elsewhere, 'fire eaters' gained political momentum, capturing popular indignation at Lincoln's election. By 1 February 1861, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas had passed secession resolutions. By 9 February, commissioners from the seven seceded states, meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, had adopted a provisional constitution and Jefferson Davis of Mississippi

became the provisional president of the Confederate States of America.

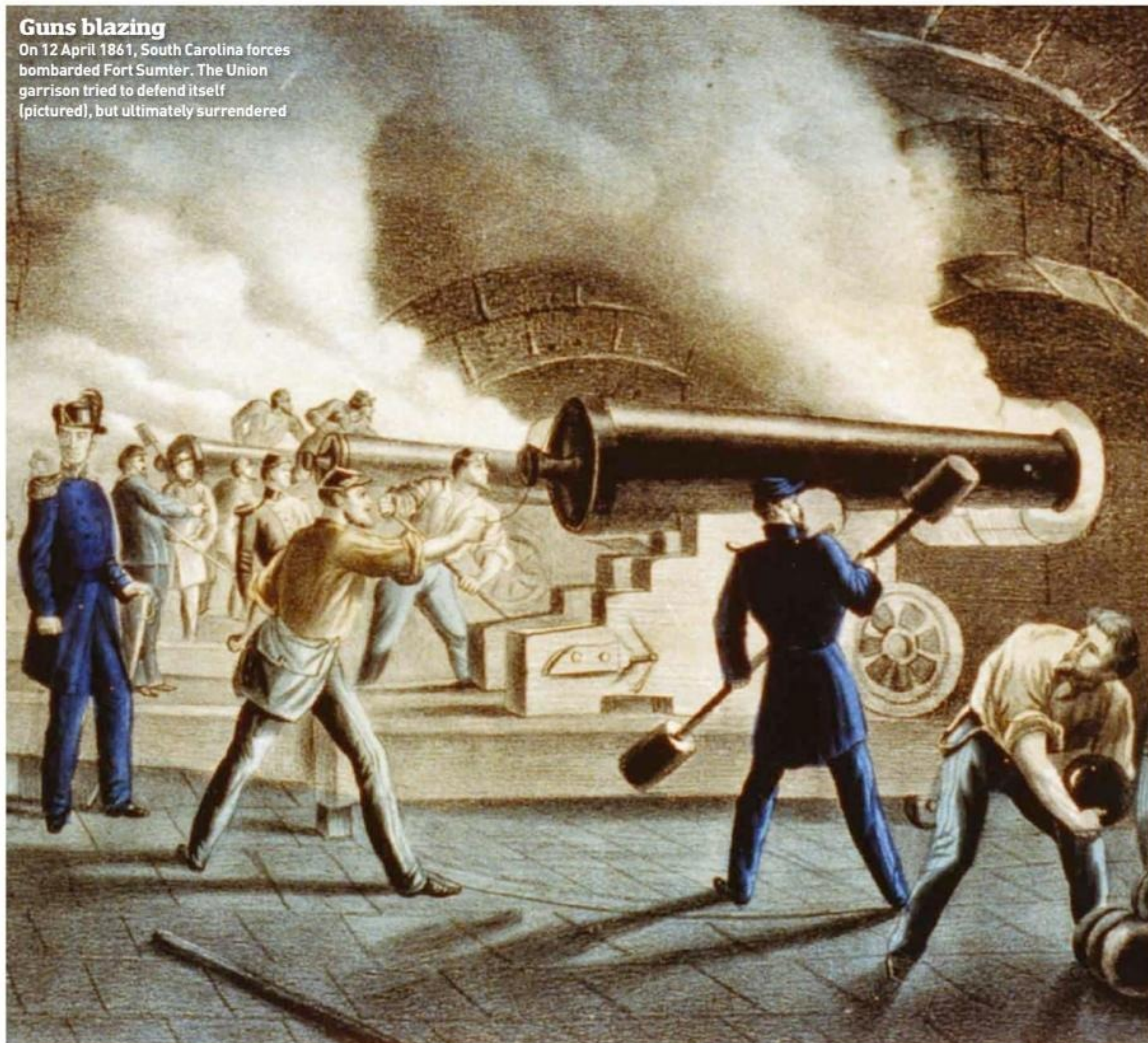
Even so, the tide of secession was held back by Unionists in the upper south states of North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas. In Virginia, still the state with the largest number of slaves, secession was opposed by those counties with fewer slaves. Although not pro-emancipation, they argued that the Union, notwithstanding the election of a president who was a 'Black Republican', still provided more security for slavery than an untested southern Confederacy.

Conscious that Lincoln's election had been entirely legitimate, some urged the southern states to wait for an 'overt act' of aggression. That overt act soon came. By June 1861, 11 slave states formed the Confederacy and prepared to defend their independence.



**Guns blazing**

On 12 April 1861, South Carolina forces bombarded Fort Sumter. The Union garrison tried to defend itself (pictured), but ultimately surrendered



## 10 Sumter and the outbreak of war, 1861

THE FIRST SHOTS of the American Civil War were fired at 4.30am on 12 April 1861 by South Carolina forces. Their target was Fort Sumter, an island in Charleston's harbour garrisoned by Union troops. Perhaps deliberately, the new president, Abraham Lincoln, had precipitated this aggression by making public his plan to re-supply (though not reinforce) the fort. By opening fire on Fort Sumter, the Confederates played into Lincoln's hands by making the issue a test of whether a free government could and would defend itself.

The shocking image of the stars and stripes under fire stirred the

north in defence of the Union, overshadowing the slavery issue. Newspapers, which the day before had called for compromise and a cooling of passions, now called for vengeance and urged their readers to rally behind the flag.

On 15 April, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers under the 1795 Militia Act to serve for 90 days, the maximum amount prescribed by the law. This was the 'overt act' of aggression that prompted the states of Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas and Tennessee to join their fellow southern slave states in seceding. With the seceded states making clear they were fighting for

nothing less than independence, the Lincoln administration mobilised for a war to bring the rebels forcibly back into the Union.

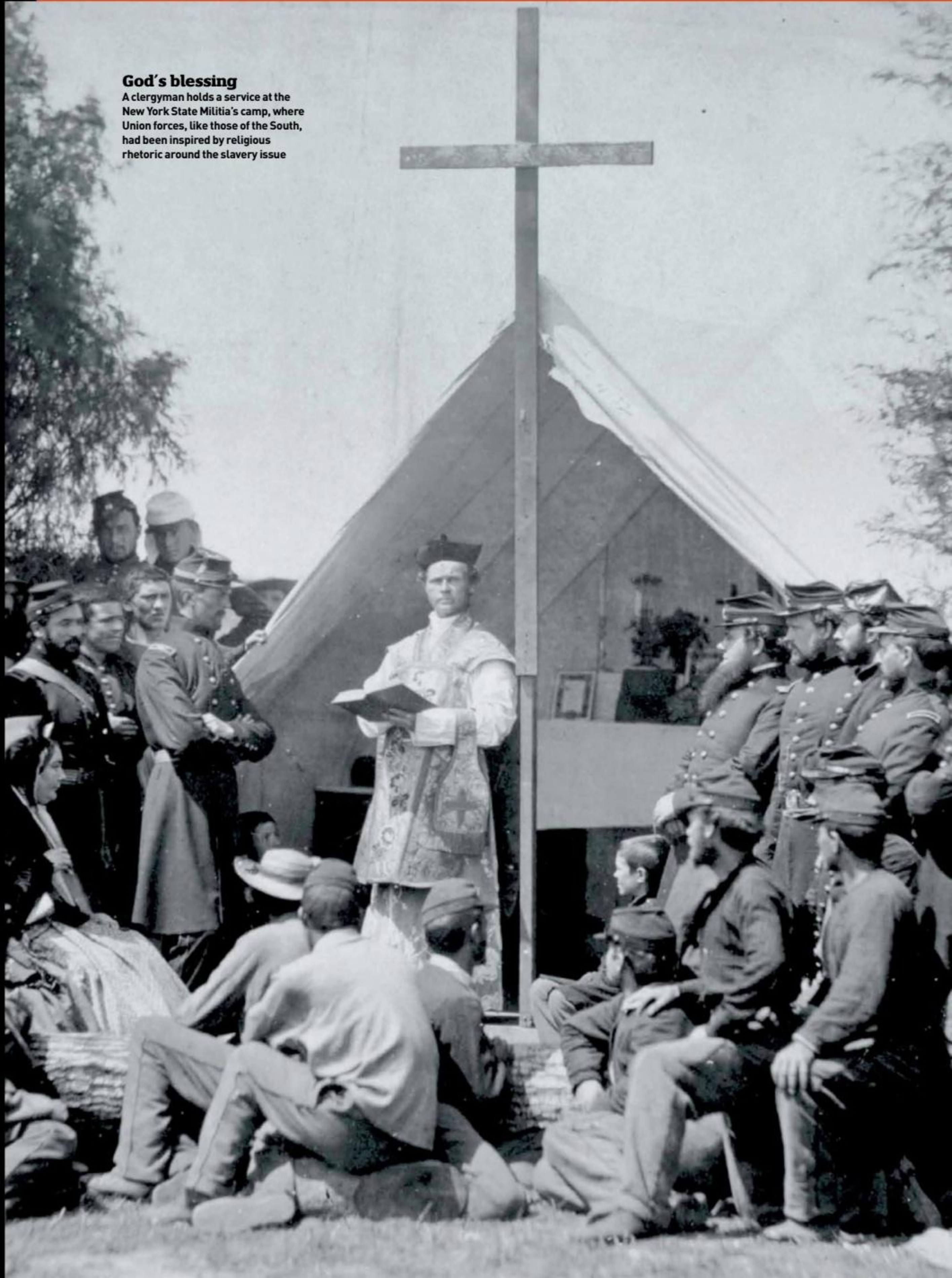
Abraham Lincoln never recognised the Confederacy: to him these states were simply rebels and the war a giant police action to restore the authority of the national government. "Secession", Lincoln insisted, was "the essence of anarchy".

▶▶▶ Turn to page 32 to learn how battles at Bull Run creek, Shiloh, and Gettysburg shaped the next stage of the American Civil War



**God's blessing**

A clergyman holds a service at the New York State Militia's camp, where Union forces, like those of the South, had been inspired by religious rhetoric around the slavery issue





# WITH GOD ON THEIR SIDE

Slavery divided north and south, but it was only when evangelical politics elevated the issue into a religious crusade that each side saw a moral obligation to go to war, argues **David Goldfield**

**S**ISTER MARY JOHN, of the Catholic convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, had gone missing. Inflamed by rumours of debauchery, mysterious rites and nuns held against their will, local people were already suspicious of the hilltop convent. They were worried about the 30 Protestant girls who were housed at the convent's elite Catholic school and now they feared for the safety of the missing nun.

Lyman Beecher, a prominent New England evangelical religious figure, was particularly concerned. Caught up in a religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening, he had moved from Boston to the raw frontier town of Cincinnati where he established a seminary with the aim of saving the American west from Roman Catholicism.

## Anti-Catholic diatribe

While in Cincinnati, Beecher set down his ideas in a popular book, *A Plea for the West* (1835). It exposed an alleged Catholic conspiracy to defile western virgin land, using the "dread confessional" to manipulate elections and "inflame and divide the nation, break the bond of our union, and throw down our free institutions". The mission of America to guide the world to grace depended on "the religious and political destiny" of the west. And

this destiny depended on capturing the west for white Protestants.

In the summer of 1834, he returned east to Boston to preach three fiery anti-Catholic sermons exhorting congregations to action against "popery". The immediate cause for his alarm was the

## The South had a duty "to ourselves, to our slaves" to preserve the existing system

disappearance of Sister Mary John. The day after Beecher's incendiary diatribes, a mob of Protestant working men burned the convent to the ground. Fortunately, the residents escaped unharmed.

For the past half century, historians have argued that slavery caused the civil war. No slavery, no war. Yet most Americans continue to believe otherwise. In 2009, a national survey of high school history teachers turned up just 17 per cent who blamed slavery as the cause. States' rights, the tariff, greed and self-determination were among the alternatives.

This denial is all the more confounding because the record of that time is clear. As Confederate

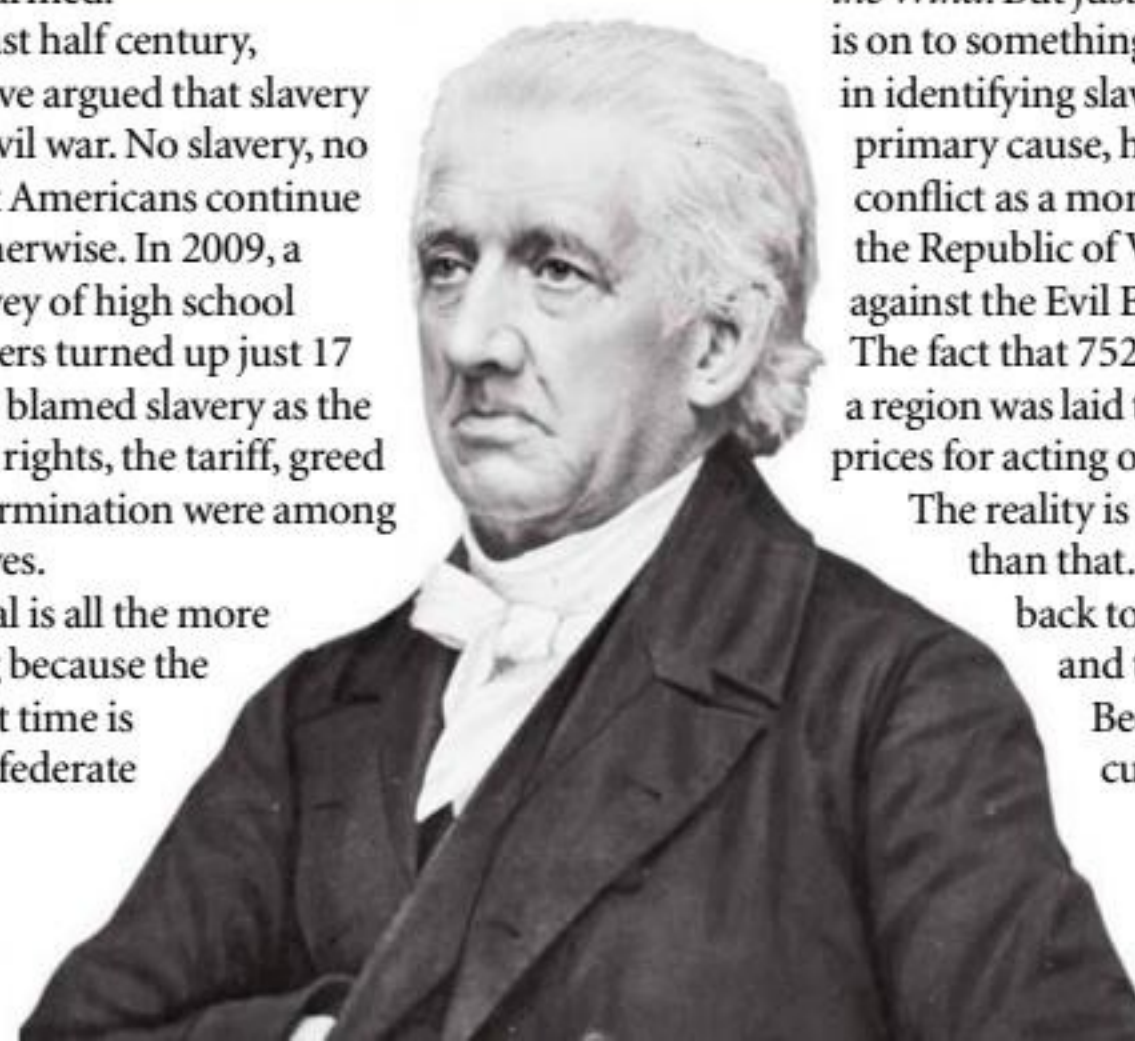
Vice President Alexander Stephens observed in 1861, slavery was the cornerstone of the new government. The Rev Benjamin M Palmer, a leading evangelical minister, sermonised that only independence could fulfill the south's "providential trust": the duty "to ourselves, to our slaves, to the world, and to Almighty God... to preserve and transmit our existing system of domestic servitude".

## Virtue versus evil

So it happens that many Americans continue to believe something contrary to established facts. This is partly because it's uncomfortable to associate an entire people with slavery. Popular culture also plays a role. Many still have a gauzy image of the old south drawn from *Gone With the Wind*. But just maybe the public is on to something in that historians, in identifying slavery as the war's primary cause, have established the conflict as a morality play pitting the Republic of Virtue (the North) against the Evil Empire (the South). The fact that 752,000 men died and a region was laid to waste seem heavy prices for acting out this drama.

The reality is more complicated than that. And that brings us back to Sister Mary John and the Rev Lyman Beecher, and the current of

Lyman Beecher's preaching was anti-Catholic and abolitionist







The Mexican-American War arguably grew partly from a US sense of "manifest destiny"

➤ American life their story represents. Why did slavery, which had existed since the nation's founding, cause Americans to turn violently against each other in 1861? The answer is that the political system failed. In a system based upon the balance of powers, where compromise and moderation carry the day, slavery became an issue that increasingly polarised the political process in America.

The polarisation occurred because religion infected the political process, transforming slavery from a political issue to a moral cause. Your political opponent was no longer misguided or misinformed, he was evil. And how do you compromise with sin? In short, self-righteousness hijacked the American political system and justified a holy war either to liberate slaves (the North) or to preserve slavery (the South).

## A mission to conquer

Religion, as Beecher's writings and speeches show us, had much to do with another great episode of the era: the movement west. Americans believed that it was their God-ordained mission to conquer a



**Mass immigration**  
Irish Catholics prepare to leave Ireland for America where a million arrived in the mid-19th century, an influx that made some Protestants feel threatened

continent from sea to shining sea. John L O'Sullivan, a Harvard-educated journalist, coined a phrase for this geographic entitlement and providential oversight when he wrote in July 1845 of "our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions".

Of course, Native Americans and Mexicans populated some of this manifest territory, but the former evinced no religion that was familiar to white Americans, and the latter were mostly Roman Catholics. It is not surprising that within a year of O'Sullivan's dictum, the US was at war with Mexico.

It turned out that northern evangelicals were as intent on keeping out southern slaveholders from the west as they were to cleanse it of Catholics. Beecher was not only an anti-Catholic zealot, he was an antislavery advocate. The equation between slavery and Catholicism was easy for many northern Protestants: both were predicated on despotism; both existed in a hierarchical system; and both relied on the ignorance of its adherents to sustain a relatively privileged and wealthy leisure class.

In addition, both appeared to threaten the American system of government by the consent of the governed. The failed European revolutions of 1848 impressed upon

## Timeline

## THE ROAD TO WAR Key events that turned slavery into a crusade

**1846**

### Wilmot Proviso

David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania Democrat, offers an amendment to an appropriations bill for the Mexican-American War banning slavery from any territory gained from that war. The House passes the proviso more than 50 times between 1846 and 1850, but it always fails in the Senate. The debate sows distrust between northerners and southerners, heightening sectional tension.

**1850**

### Compromise of 1850

The north secures California as a free state and southerners get the Fugitive Slave Act (captured runaways to be returned to 'masters'). It is small consolation, especially as it galvanises northern opposition. Northerners' evasion of the Act convinces southerners the North is insincere in its commitment to resolve the sectional controversy.

**1852**

### Publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

The book becomes a bestseller and convinces many northerners, previously indifferent to the institution of slavery, that human bondage perverts Christianity.



Americans how fragile democratic institutions were. With the influx of more than one million Irish Catholics in the decade after 1847, and the growing crisis over the extension of slavery in the western territories, the American experiment seemed vulnerable.

### The truth of God

By the late 1840s, messianic Protestantism had already begun to seep into the political process. The Liberty Party appeared in 1840 urging citizens to support it “as a religious duty”. One of its leaders asserted, “The Liberty Party, unlike any other in history, was founded on moral principles – on the Bible, originating a contest not only against slavery but against atheistic politics.”

The Free Soil Party tapped into the evangelical spirit in the north, staging a revival-style convention in Buffalo, New York, in August 1848. Speakers called for a “great moral revolution” founded on “the idea of right and justice and the truth of God”.

Messianic politics received a significant boost in 1850 from a speech by New York Senator William H Seward during the debate over the admission of California to the Union as a free state. “There is a higher law than the Constitution,” he declared, “which regulates our authority over this domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes.” In a nation predicated on law and, specifically the Constitution, this appeal was especially troublesome.

By 1853, another Protestant party emerged, the Know Nothings. Rather than slavery, the new party focused on the dangers of immigration, especially of Irish Roman Catholics.

Although the Know Nothings presented themselves as advocates of electoral reform through efforts to restrict the political and civil rights of immigrants, their appeal rested on good old religious bigotry. Their animus against foreigners drew a significant following among the Protestant working class. Newspaper editor William Brownlow expressed the raw prejudice behind the veneer of reform: “We can have no peace in this country until the CATHOLICS ARE EXTERMINATED.”

The Liberty Party, the Free Soilers, and the Know Nothings could not build a national constituency to challenge the Democratic Party. By the mid-1850s, these forces coalesced into a new and ultimately more successful political organisation, the Republican Party, which merged the antislavery and anti-Catholic strains of messianic Protestantism.

The first national Republican convention occurred in Philadelphia in June 1856. It was a time of great agitation on the slavery issue – Kansas was ablaze in a civil war over slavery and earlier in the year a southern Congressman had seriously injured Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner in retaliation for an antislavery diatribe. It was also a time of mounting concerns about immigration, often expressed in violent clashes between Catholics and Protestants in the nation’s cities, especially around elections.

### Religious rhetoric

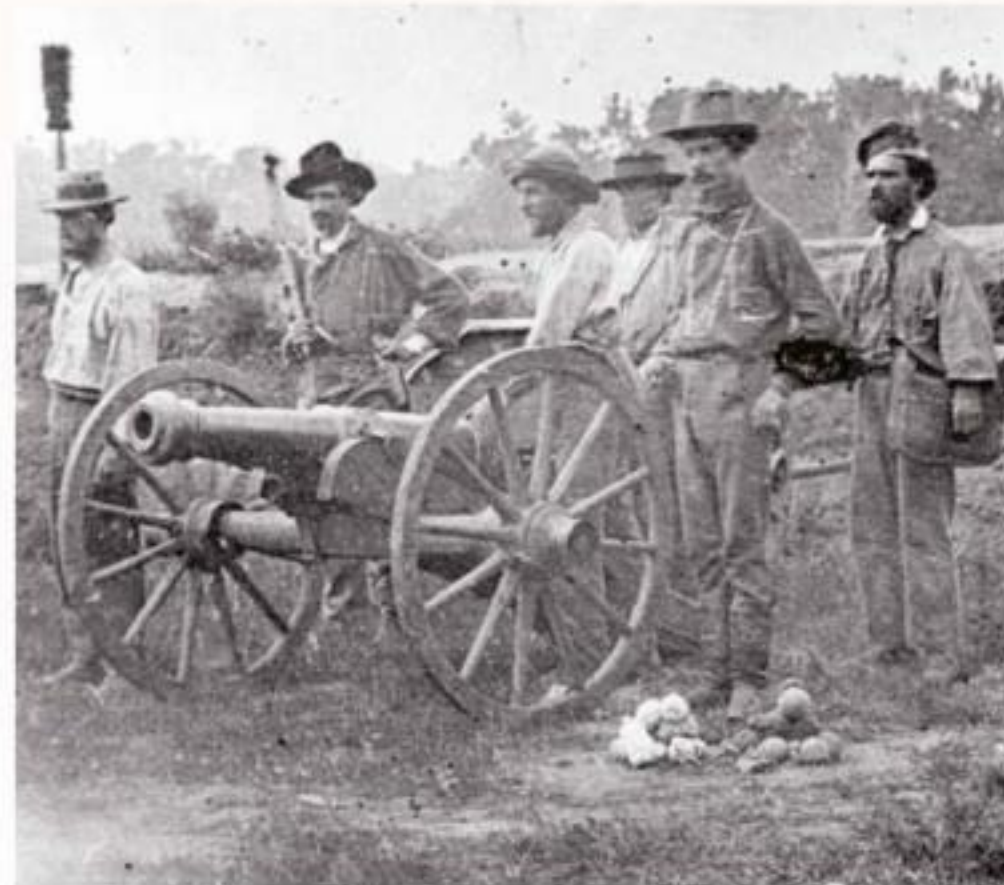
A participant at the Republican convention reported that the gathering resembled a “Methodist conference rather than a political convention”, and another

characterised the party platform as “God’s revealed Word”.

The ubiquity of religious rhetoric and imagery in the Republican campaign further polarised an already divided Union. One minister summarised the upcoming election as “a decisive struggle... between freedom and slavery, truth and falsehood, justice and oppression, God and the devil”. For a political system that depends upon moderation and compromise, these were not promising sentiments.

Abraham Lincoln came to the Republican Party relatively late. He was not a religious bigot, although he vigorously opposed the extension ➤

## By the late 1840s, messianic Protestantism began to seep into the political process



### Men at arms

Members of a battery formed to fight proslavery forces in Kansas during the Bleeding Kansas period, pictured in 1856

## 1854

### Kansas-Nebraska Act repeals Missouri Compromise

The act allows southerners to bring slaves into an area that was formerly closed to slavery, thereby repealing the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and angering northerners.

## 1855

### Bleeding Kansas

The Kansas-Nebraska Act leads to a series of violent political confrontations in Kansas between proslavery and abolitionist factions.

## 1856

### Election of Democrat James Buchanan to the Presidency

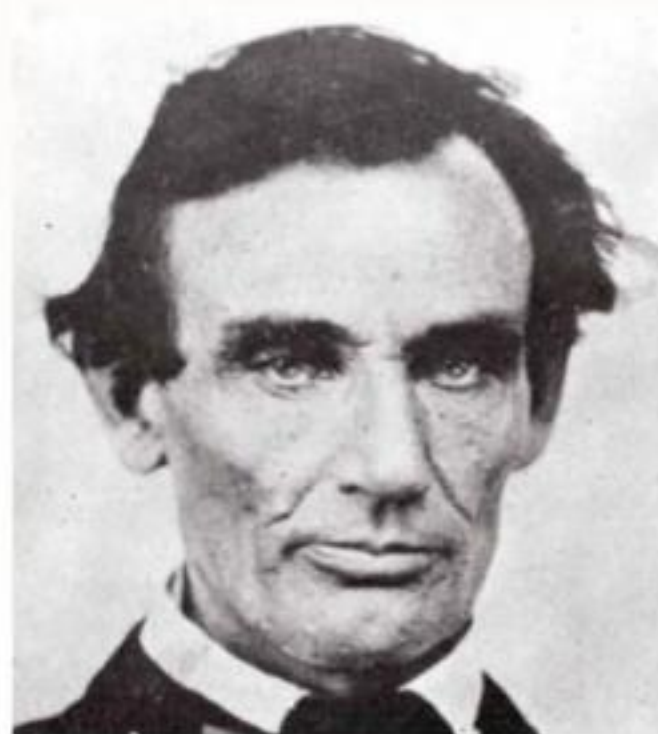
The Democrats, the nation’s only remaining national party, wins the presidency. But a new party, the Republicans, combining anti-immigrant and antislavery constituencies, makes a strong showing throughout the north. ➤



➤ of slavery in the territories. By the late 1850s, however, his writing and his speeches exhibited an increasingly messianic tone. In accepting the Republican nomination for the US Senate race in Illinois in 1858, Abraham Lincoln took his text from Matthew 12:25: "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

### Lincoln's God-given mission

His conviction had grown that America could not fulfill its God-given mission nor preserve its fragile institutions if the nation persisted half slave and half free. It must be one or the other. This was not a Union-loving compromiser talking. The mounting political crisis had convinced him that the battle must be joined, probably sooner rather than later. The Illinois Republican Party dedicated its campaign that autumn to vanquishing: "The



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X3

Lincoln's vigorous opposition to slavery was fuelled by his religious convictions



### No sleep 'til election day

A membership certificate for the Wide-Awake Club, a radical Republican marching club formed in 1860

Two-Despotisms – Catholicism and Slavery – Their Union and Identity."

Lincoln's senatorial campaign and his debates against the Democrat Stephen A Douglas propelled him to national prominence and he became the party's presidential candidate in 1860. Republican rallies that year exuded an evangelical fervour that blended religious and military pageantry. The Wide-Awakes, the party's shock troops of younger voters, paraded in black oilcloth capes and red shirts after the fashion of the Paris revolutionaries of 1848. They even marched into the Democratic stronghold of New York, holding their torches high through

the narrow streets preceded by booming military bands entreating citizens to march: "On for freedom, God, our country, and the right."

Former Know Nothings in Republican ranks grasped the evangelical fervour of the campaign to pursue their attacks on the Catholic Church. A Republican newspaper, blending antislavery and nativist rhetoric, alleged that: "Roman Catholics, whose consciences are enslaved... regard the King of Rome – the Pope – as the depository of all authority." Republicans distilled the Democrats to an unholy trinity of "the Pope, a whisky barrel and a nigger driver".

## THE ROAD TO WAR continued



**1857**

### Supreme Court issues Dred Scott Decision

Chief Justice Roger Taney issues a sweeping ruling declaring that black people are not citizens and therefore lack standing to sue, and that Congress can not ban slavery in the territories.



**1859**

### John Brown's raid fails at Harpers Ferry, Virginia

With the aid of funds from New England, abolitionist John Brown captures the federal arsenal hoping in vain to instigate a slave revolt – although he only succeeds in worsening sectional tensions.



**1860**

### Election of Republican Abraham Lincoln as president

With the Democratic Party divided along sectional lines and a new party – the Constitutional Union Party – in the race, Abraham Lincoln wins the election, triggering the secession movement in the lower south states.



By the time of the 1860 presidential election, Americans had become accustomed to viewing political events in moral terms. Three prominent events in particular seemed part of a vast evil conspiracy (depending on where you lived).

Firstly, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 had repealed the 1820 Missouri Compromise, thereby opening up Kansas to slavery and precipitating a bloody civil war in that territory.

Secondly, the US Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case effectively declared Congressional authority to ban slavery in the territories as unconstitutional (and therefore undercut one of the major tenets of the Republican Party).

Finally, abolitionist John Brown's raid on the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in October 1859 was feared by southerners to be the first of many northern plots to cause a slave rebellion. Righteousness replaced the Constitution as the arbiter of policy.

### Bible waving

We know the rest of the story: Lincoln was elected president; the lower southern states seceded; the Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861; and the civil war began. Yes, slavery was the major cause of the war. But evangelical politics polarised and poisoned the political process. Politicians in the 1850s posed, postured and waved Bibles, but they did not resolve the major issues until there was no longer much chance they could. The centre eroded and the extremes ruled.

War is rarely inevitable. There were numerous points at which



### A slave rebellion

Southerners were horrified by John Brown's attempt to inspire a slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry in 1859

President Lincoln or Confederate President Jefferson Davis could have stood down and averted what became the bloodiest conflict in American history. Lincoln's decision to provision Fort Sumter, his unwillingness to consider compromise proposals that had the

## Slavery was the major cause of the war. But evangelical politics polarised and poisoned the political process

backing of many in the north, and his massive troop call-up following the firing on Sumter were just as fateful as Davis's decision to fire on the fort during the dawn's early light of 12 April 1861. When you believe God is on your side, why hesitate?

And so what did happen to Sister Mary John whose disappearance caused such a furor? The summer heat and having to teach 14 gruelling lessons a day had propelled her exit from the convent. She rested at a neighbouring farmhouse for two days and then returned to her post. She was actually in the convent when the Protestant mob, avenging her 'abduction', destroyed the building.

### A holy conflict

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lyman's daughter, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became an antislavery Bible in its own right, summarised the evangelical response to Sumter.

To Stowe, the civil war was a millennial war, "the last struggle for liberty" that would precede the coming of the Lord: "God's just wrath shall be wreaked on a giant wrong."

Her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, related the familiar story of Exodus to his congregation, how Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt to the Red Sea, and how the sea parted and allowed the chosen people to escape. "And now our turn has come," he exclaimed. "Right before us lies the Red Sea of War." And God was ready, foretelling Julia Ward Howe's famous lines, "that awful wine-press of the Wrath of Almighty God" would come down from the heavens and bury the South.

The war that followed buried 752,000 men. That war should teach us that self-righteousness and religious certitude are more likely to lead to violent rather than peaceful resolution and that even a good cause – the abolition of slavery – may be served better by peace than conflict. We will never know, of course, but the struggle of African-Americans to attain basic rights for a century after the war should motivate us to speculate on a different outcome. Let us honour the men who died. But it would have been a greater tribute to the nation had they lived. ■

**David Goldfield** is the Robert Lee Bailey Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. His most recent book is the widely acclaimed *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (Bloomsbury, 2011)

## 1861

### Firing on Fort Sumter; civil war begins

The fort in Charleston harbour is one of the last remaining federally held forts in the Confederate states. When Lincoln decides to resupply the garrison in April, rebel batteries fire on the fort and the civil war begins.





# A LIFE IN CHAINS

## HUNGRY, RAGGED AND ILL-USED

There were four million enslaved people in America when the civil war broke out and their plight was the primary cause of the conflict. What was life like for these descendants of people abducted from their African homes?

**A**FRICANS WERE AMONG the very earliest settlers of Britain's North American colonies. Scattered references to their presence can be found in Virginia census returns of the 1610s. These men, women and children were among the approximately 12 million enslaved people who, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, endured the so-called Middle Passage, the journey in filthy, cramped and pestilent slave-ships from Africa to the new world.

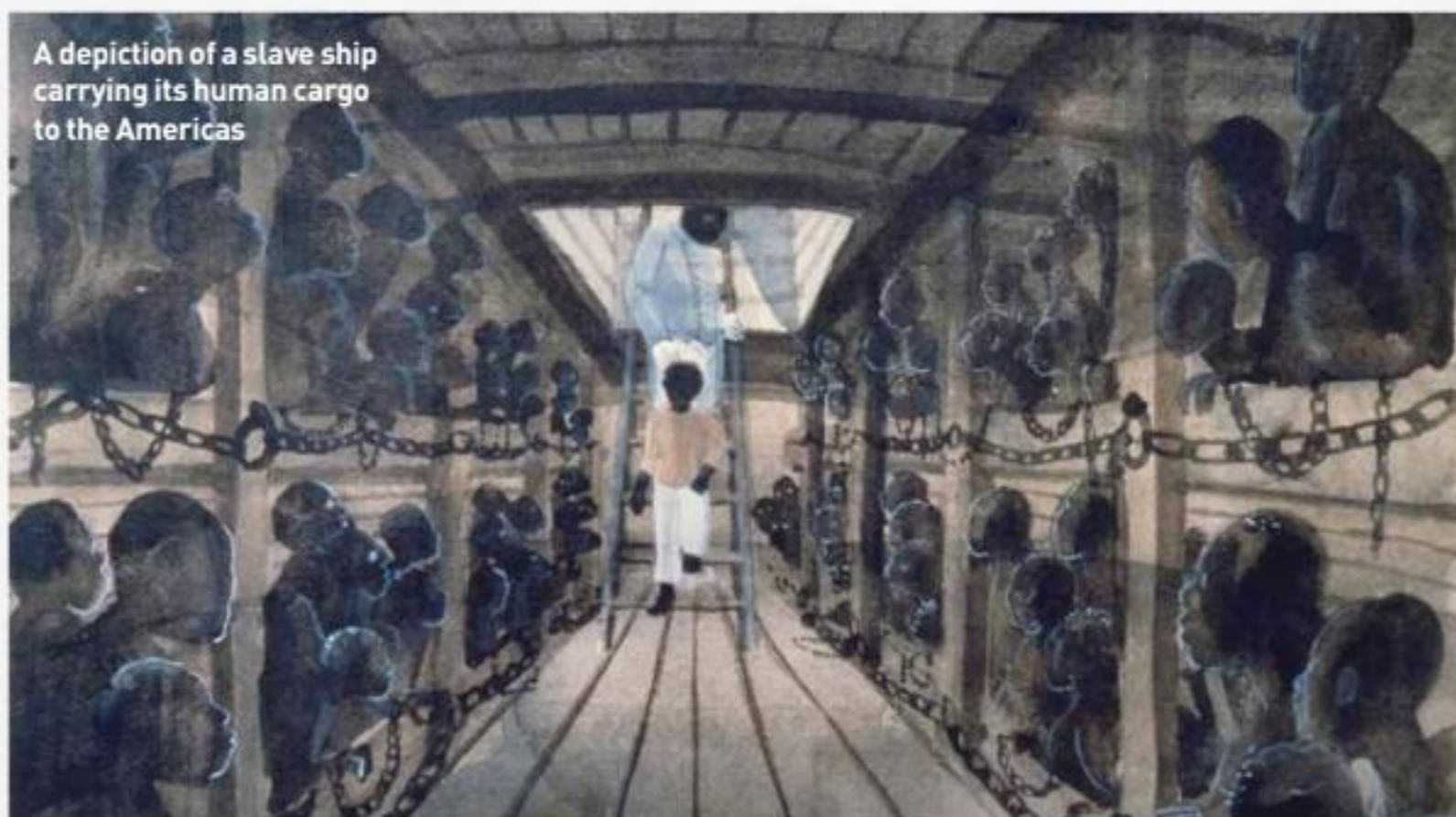
The majority of those who survived the dreadful crossing were transported to Spanish and Portuguese colonies, or to British and French possessions in the Caribbean. The British colonies on continental North America that would one day become the United States were

a secondary market, the final destination for about 600,000 of these stolen people. Yet that enslaved population would ultimately grow to over three million by 1850, concentrated in the southern states of the Union, the northern states having abolished slavery after gaining independence from Great Britain. In the 1700s, slaves laboured on plantations, farming such crops as tobacco in Virginia, and rice in Georgia and the Carolinas. By the mid-19th century, the most profitable crop was cotton, its production centred in the states of the deep south's western frontier, such as Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama and Texas.

Yet American slavery needs to be understood as more than just an economic system. Even before the Atlantic slave trade was first established, there existed within

European society negative attitudes towards Africans based upon their skin colour, and their supposed 'heathenism' and 'savagery', which served as justifications for their enslavement. Race slavery was therefore a social and cultural phenomenon as much as an economic one. By 1861, although only a minority of white southerners actually owned slaves, the majority of them were prepared to fight in defence of slavery because their own social status was dependent upon the enslavement of those allegedly inferior beings with black skins.

Furthermore, propagandists such as the Virginian planter George Fitzhugh rejected claims that slavery was cruel or exploitative, and argued that the system was based upon mutual obligations and shared responsibilities between a master and 'his people', not the selfish pursuit of profit. Slaves, he said, were actually better cared for than the 'wage slaves' who toiled in the mills and factories of New England. In the north, abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass (himself a former slave who had escaped his bondage) responded by pointing to the use of the whip in managing slaves, to children torn from the arms of their mothers on auction blocks, and men unable to defend wives and daughters from sexual assault. The slaves of abolitionist literature were hungry, ragged and ill-used. So what does history tell us of the experience of slavery?



A depiction of a slave ship carrying its human cargo to the Americas

AVG IMAGES, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X2

**Gervase Phillips** is a principal lecturer in history at Manchester Metropolitan University



## Working lives

BY 1850, SOME 2.5 million of the south's three million slaves were employed as agricultural labourers, but a significant minority was involved in other economic activities. Southern cities, such as Richmond and Charleston, were home to many skilled slave craftsmen and artisans: carpenters, coopers, smiths and bakers. The south's railroads and dirt tracks were the daily workplace of slave coachmen, carters and mule drivers. The region's industrial sector was small, but not insignificant, and it too employed many slaves. For example, by 1860, Virginia's Tredegar iron works had moved from a largely free work force to a predominantly enslaved one. Mining operations and the engine

rooms of the paddle steamers on the Ohio, the Cumberland and the Mississippi rivers also relied upon the strong arms of the south's enslaved workers.

In a free labour system, only a minority, typically under half, of available 'workers' are actually engaged in economically productive activities (others are retired, studying or full-time homemakers). In a slave labour force, few can avoid work. This was, essentially, what made American slavery so productive. The majority of slaves worked, and working days were typically sun-up to sun-down. Women toiled in the fields until the final stages of pregnancy. Aged five, children might be scaring birds off seeds; aged seven, they would be toting water for field hands.

Tending cotton was physically demanding work undertaken largely by slaves



The elderly, the infirm, the disabled – work would be found for them all. Furthermore, cultivating difficult crops such as tobacco, cotton, sugar and rice demanded exhausting,

back-breaking labour. And while the attention the fields needed varied with the seasons, there would always be work to do: mending fences, clearing new ground, weaving and spinning.

## Motivation and coercion

INCENTIVISING WORK WAS one means by which slaves were motivated: extra food, clothes, holidays from work, a patch of ground to cultivate and positions of responsibility for trusted individuals. Furthermore, in one sense slaves always had an incentive to work hard. If their master's enterprise failed, they were the ones who would likely suffer most: rations cut, clothing allowance slashed, perhaps even sale on the auction block to cover losses. So it is incorrect to think of the slave workforce as one that lacked incentives.

What is less clear is the balance between physical coercion and the possibility of reward in motivating slaves to work hard and well. When we think of American slavery, the mental image we probably most readily conjure up is of the slave gang working directly under the watchful eye of an overseer or driver who carries a whip. Nor is this mental image inaccurate: the organisation of slaves as gang labour was commonplace, particularly in the cultivation of tobacco and cotton, and the lash certainly underpinned labour management.

Yet this was not the whole story. For example, on the rice plantations of the South Carolina and Georgia low country, slaves were worked in gangs less often. Usually,

individual slaves worked at set 'tasks'. Once these tasks were completed, their time was their own – to cultivate their own crops or fish or engage in cottage industries, such as basket weaving. This gave slaves an incentive to finish tasks – the time and labour they 'owed' to their masters – before effectively working for themselves, either to better their material conditions directly, by growing food to supplement their rations, or even to engage in trade and make some money. Without losing sight of the violence, or threat of violence, that ultimately secured the labour of slaves, we should recognise that in certain favourable circumstances, slaves, like wage labourers, might themselves enjoy the fruits of their own hard work.



Overseers would resort to harsh punishments if an individual slave caused them problems





South Carolina, 1860 – children gather next to the shacks that housed them

## Accommodation, food and health

SLAVE CABINS WERE basic in construction and furnishing, at best comparable only to the dwellings of the very poorest class of white society. Yet there was general recognition in the decades before the American Civil War that this situation should be improved. Doctors demanded that slave-owners provide better accommodation, for they had identified slave quarters as breeding grounds for disease. Poor housing conditions were a major contribution to slave morbidity: malaria, typhus, cholera, tuberculosis and dysentery took an unrelenting toll of lives. In the 1830s, the mortality rate on the rice plantations located in the feverish South Carolina low country reached a shocking 97.6 per 1,000, which was

three times the rate for north America as a whole.

By the middle of the 19th century, more attention was paid to the structure, maintenance and position of cabins. These were usually built on higher ground, away from stagnant water and, ideally, regularly white-washed and cleaned. Yet disease remained a day-to-day reality of slave life, frustrating the efforts of even the most well-intentioned planters. Medical care for slaves could be appallingly primitive. The British actress Frances 'Fanny' Kemble, who endured a brief and unhappy marriage to a Georgia planter, Pierce Butler, left a vivid description of the 'hospital' on one of his plantations in 1839: its floors were the damp earth and the sick "lay prostrate on

the floor, without bed, mattress or pillow, buried in tattered and filthy blankets".

Susceptibility to disease could be worsened by poor nutrition. The basic weekly rations that adult slaves received were usually a 'peck' (about two gallons) of corn meal and three or four pounds of salt pork and bacon. This might have been supplemented by produce grown by the slaves themselves and by additional items, perhaps milk, coffee and molasses, supplied by their owner, as a reward for good work. That basic ration itself was bulky but, from a nutritional perspective, lacked balance. We can speak therefore of a generally adequate diet, in that it maintained body weight and provided sufficient energy for work. However, it was a

monotonous one, and deficient enough of some key nutrients that it may have been the cause of recurrent ailments, such as a condition known as 'sore mouth', which probably resulted from a lack of riboflavin.

Much depended on the whim of individual masters. Frederick Douglass described slave children on the plantation where he grew up being fed from communal troughs on the floor like animals and how, as an adolescent, hunger was his constant companion. He turned to thievery as a simple matter of survival. In contrast, former field hand Henry Baker, interviewed in 1938, recalled the large number of hogs kept on his Alabama plantation. His master, he said, always ensured his people had "ple't ub sumpin t'eat".

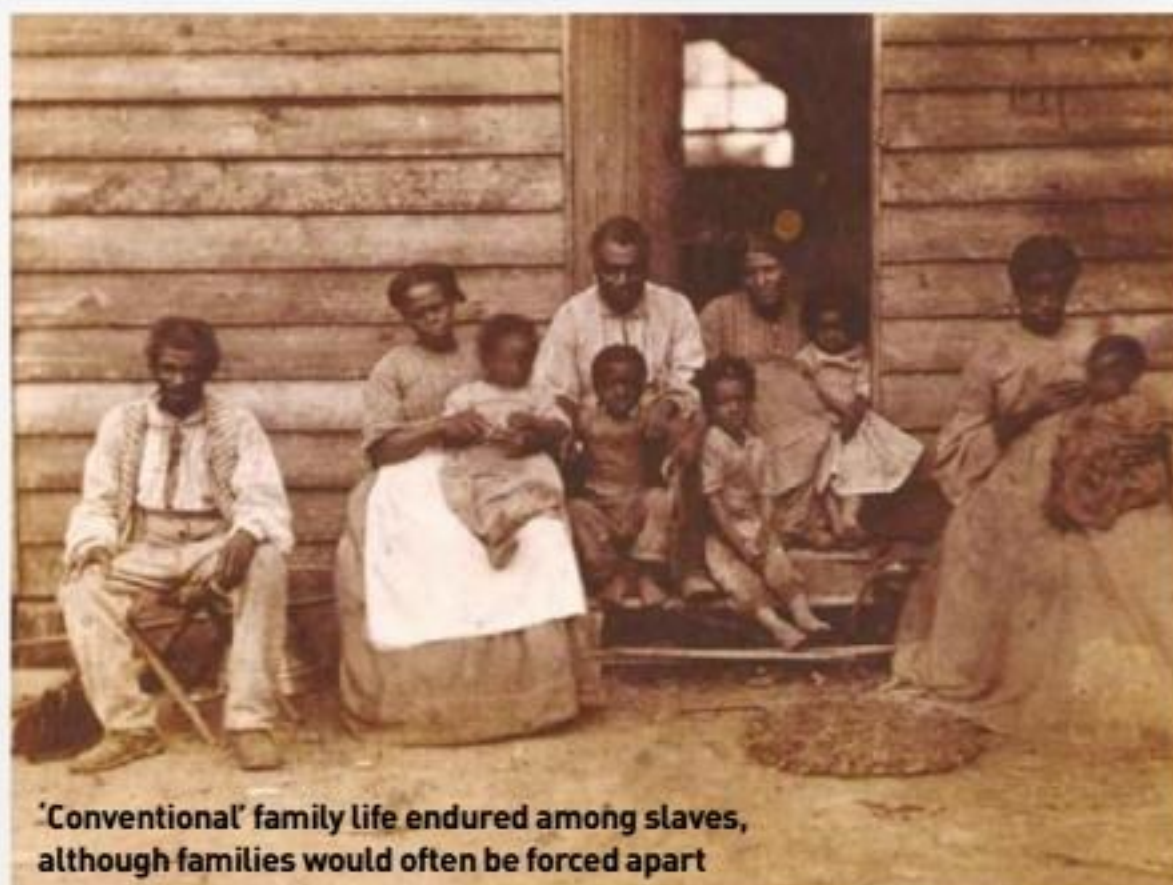


## Family ties

SLAVE MARRIAGE WAS not legally recognised and slave parents had no rights over their children. Even if well-intentioned masters were reluctant to divide parents and children, ill fortune – such as debt or the division of an estate upon a master's death – might tear relatives apart. Recent research on the internal American slave trade has estimated that in the upper south, which became a net exporter of slaves in the decade before the Civil War, a third of first marriages were broken by forced separation and nearly 50 per cent of slave children would lose touch with at least one parent. Such events caused deep emotional pain. Susan Boggs, who eventually fled to freedom in Canada, recalled

a fellow slave women "who went crazy because her two sons were sold... She went up and down the street, crying like an animal."

Yet, notwithstanding their vulnerability, families were immensely important on the plantations. Many planters actively supported them, either out of a sense of moral obligation or because married and settled slaves were easier to control. The enslaved themselves showed a remarkable and resilient commitment to the institution of marriage, and typically lived in two-parent families with their children – a relationship that was if necessary re-created with step-parents should the original family be separated.



Despite the confining nature of plantation life, marriage was exogamous (of non blood-related beings) and even marriage among first cousins seemed rare. Partners were selected from other families on the

plantation or marriages were made 'abroad', with those living on different plantations. These unions were considered permanent until death – or distance – separated husband and wife.

## Paternalism and defiance

THERE CAN BE no doubt that some planters took a paternalistic interest in the lives of slaves. Charles Manigault, who belonged to a respected family in Charleston, regarded

the enslaved as members of his own extended family. They were dressed in good-quality cloth, which he presented to each personally. Their food, their quarters, their very happiness

were matters of pressing concern to him. He insisted, too, that his overseers refrain from physical brutality. And yet his slaves laboured and died, usually prematurely, in one of the harshest working environments found in the southern USA: a Georgia rice plantation.

In other instances, even the notion of 'paternalism' was absent. African-Americans could not testify in court against a white man, and consequently were defenceless against those masters who were rapacious or brutal. Records speak forcefully of cruelty: taking a runaway into custody, a jailer in Louisiana noted: "He has been lately gelded and is not yet well."

With slavery policed by patrols and militias, open revolt occurred only rarely. An example

was the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia in 1831, in which the charismatic preacher led around 70 followers in a violent outburst, killing about 60 whites. The rebellion was crushed within two days. Mostly discontented slaves employed day-to-day forms of resistance: sabotage, working slowly or ineffectively, arson and, most effectively, running away.

The civil war offered the enslaved their greatest chance to express their own views on slavery. Their actions spoke loudly. Even before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, they abandoned the fields in tens of thousands and swarmed into Union lines. By forcing the issue of emancipation upon Washington they in turn ensured their children would not have to endure slavery. **H**



Nat Turner, who led a slave rebellion in 1831, was captured and hanged



# WHY PEOPLE FOUGHT: THE SOUTH

Whatever their individual motivations, Confederates were united in their wish to protect a slave-based society, as **Richard Carwardine** explains

**T**HE CIVIL WAR took a grievous toll of Confederate lives. During the conflict, at least three quarters of a million men, approximately four in every five of the available white population of draft age, served in the armies of the South. More than a quarter of a million of these troops died on the battlefield or from disease. Another 200,000 were wounded in combat. But these appalling figures fail to reveal the full human horror of the fighting. The experience of battle was so harrowing that in their letters home soldiers remained protectively silent about the worst of it.

What then propelled southerners in arms – the vast majority of whom were volunteers, not conscripts – to fight in these numbers and at such personal cost? This, of course, is a two-fold question: why did they enlist in the first place and why did they go on fighting?

## Defending a way of life

Put simply, Confederates took up arms to defend the independence their leaders had declared during the winter of 1860–61. State-by-state secession across the lower south was designed to protect its slave-based society from erosion – even direct assault – by Lincoln's incoming administration. The Confederate Vice President Alexander H Stephens frankly declared that the South's new government was designed to guarantee African slavery and "put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institutions".

Lincoln's 'assault' on southern independence – attempting to re-supply the federal fort in Charleston harbour and thus provoking Confederate fire – prompted a fever of enlistments across the seceded states, soon increased by a further four

in the upper south. All classes of white men volunteered, in their tens of thousands. They were moved by duty, by loyalty to their states, and by a concern to protect their families and homes from invasion. Many were outraged at an attack on southern honour, others sought excitement and glory. But amongst these and other motives, a universal impulse underpinned southern patriotism: the defence of slavery and the racial order it sustained.

Slave owners were openly determined to protect their 'property' and prevent what they were sure would follow the emancipation of four million slaves: racial terror, physical assault and sexual violation.

## Confederates of all classes saw themselves as resisting northern 'enslavement'

A Georgian farmer signed up because: "Our homes, our firesides, our land and negroes and even the virtue of our fair ones is at stake." A Virginian thought it far better to "endure all the horrors of civil war than to see the dusky sons of Ham leading the fair daughters of the south to the altar".

Although most Confederate soldiers were non-slaveholders – yeoman farmers and poor whites – their attachment to slavery transcended class divisions. Too much can be made of the complaint of some that this was "a rich man's war but a poor man's fight". Slavery gave an equality of racial status to all white men, mostly unified by a belief in the institution's scriptural integrity and godliness, and in its virtuous protection of white families within a society where four out of 10 people were black. In 1861, all Confederates,

regardless of class, saw themselves as resisting northern 'enslavement' in a fight for liberty they likened to the Patriots' Revolution of 1776.

## Losing the war

Confederate soldiers' motives for fighting did not change fundamentally over time, even when the promising victories of 1862 and 1863 gave way to grimmer realities, war weariness and, eventually, defeatism. Desertion was less meaningful than the raw numbers suggest, since many men left their regiments to protect their homes, before returning to service. Nor was there a simple picture of declining morale: the

Army of Northern Virginia put the same numbers into the field each spring from 1863 to 1865. Sick as they were of war, men went on fighting out of loyalty and comradeship, and a sense of obligation to those who had sacrificed their lives.

Securing the future of black slavery, however, was what above all continued to animate Confederate troops. One cavalryman deemed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation "worth 300,000 soldiers to our government at least. It shows exactly what this war was brought about for and the intention of its damnable authors." The passage through Congress of the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, spurred weary and stoic Confederates to stay in the field. It was only in the final weeks of the war, when the South's leaders moved purposefully to arm black slaves, that the cord that bound commanders and common soldiers snapped. "If we are reduced to that extremity," one exasperated private wrote about black enlistment, "stop the war at once and let us come home, for if we are to depend on the slaves for our freedom it is gone away anyway." **H**





Battered and bloodied, southern soldiers carried on fighting even as it became increasingly clear the Confederacy was losing the civil war to the North





General George B McClellan rallies his troops at the battle of Antietam in 1862, a point in the conflict when all those fighting in the Union army were volunteers

WHY PEOPLE FOUGHT:  
**THE SOUTH**



# WHY PEOPLE FOUGHT: THE NORTH

Northerners saw American mass democracy as a system of government that had to be defended from secessionists, writes **Richard Carwardine**

**I**n mobilising more than two million men during the course of the war – more than 90 per cent of them volunteers – the Union recruited twice as many combatants as the Confederates but at a relatively lower cost. The total in arms represented just half of the North's military-age population. Casualty rates, too, were half those suffered by the South. Even so, the grievous numbers of dead and wounded prompt similar questions about what it was that impelled men to volunteer to fight, to keep fighting, and in many cases to re-enlist at the end of their three-year term of service.

## Against anarchy

Young men of the Union leapt to arms for many of the same motives that impelled southerners: a desire for glory, the thrill of adventure, an assertion of manhood. But there were profound differences too. Above all, soldiers' understanding of the Union cause at the outset had less obviously to do with material interest than with a political vision: the defence of a government deemed unique in world history. Rebellion had to be put down to show that American mass democracy and representative government was no transitory experiment but a durable and God-given model for humankind. One recruit considered it a struggle of "government against anarchy, law against disorder". Immigrant volunteers for the Union – a quarter of all recruits – saw secession, if unchallenged, as the first step on the road to further separations that would condemn the country to balkanised perdition. German, Irish and other nationalist revolutionaries of 1848 hurried to fight for a Union that they perceived, in Lincoln's phrase, to be "the last best hope of earth". This impulse lost none of its power as

the war progressed. "Every day I have a more religious feeling, that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind," one officer explained; it was unbearable "to think of what my children would be if we were to permit this hell-begotten conspiracy to destroy this country".

## The growth in abolitionism

Relatively few of the early volunteers were committed abolitionists, but by the summer of 1862 a substantial minority – possibly a majority – of men in arms understood the need to destroy the 'peculiar institution' if the Union were to be preserved. Since the 'slave power' had caused the rebellion, how

## Immigrant volunteers for the Union saw secession as a step to balkanised perdition

could the war end without ending slavery? Such views became all the more common as Federal troops advanced. A Union officer writing home declared: "I am no abolitionist. But the more I see of slavery in all its enormity the more I am satisfied that it is a curse to our country." Quite apart from its cruelties, the institution, in stifling economic enterprise, appeared "as much a curse to the whites as the blacks and kills industry and improvements of every kind". Above all, slave labour kept southern farms running and freed up able-bodied whites for the front line: why, in that case, should the advancing northern armies not confiscate slave owners' 'property' and welcome slaves into the Union lines?

Emancipation, inevitably, was a divisive issue in the Union camps. The race prejudice that especially animated

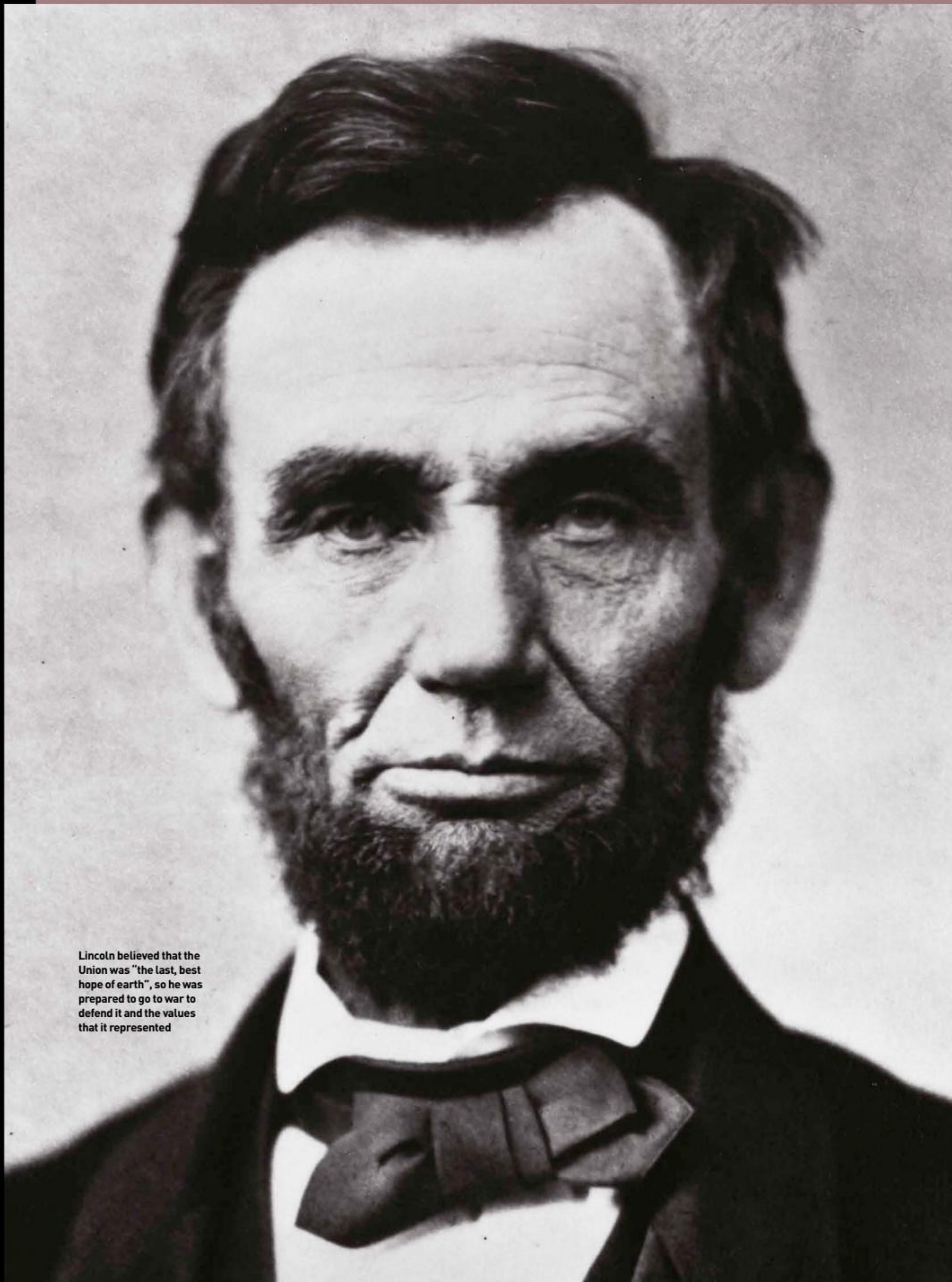
Democratic Party loyalists prompted dyspeptic fury at talk of freedom for blacks. Irish-Americans, economic competitors with African-Americans for the poorest jobs and exponents of a deeply conservative racial philosophy nurtured by the Catholic Church, were salient opponents of an 'abolition war'. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation horrified men of this cast. "I did not come out to fight for the nigger," spat a New York officer. The president "ought to be lashed up to four big fat niggers and left to wander about with them the balance of his life". With the arrival of conscription in 1863, these prejudices boiled over into rioting and the murder of African-Americans on the streets of New York City.

Over time, however, a combination of antislavery humanitarianism and pragmatism turned the Union forces into an army of liberation. Lincoln's emancipation edict, in sanctioning black enlistments, gave free blacks and refugee slaves – some 200,000 in total by the end of the war – the chance to fight for full freedom and citizenship. Union troops' attitudes had so far evolved by the final months of the war that in the presidential election of 1864, most white soldiers – four out of every five – voted for Lincoln's vision of an emancipated Union and a "new birth of freedom". By then, they would stop at nothing short of an unconditional surrender of the South to prove, as one put it, "that the American people can and will govern themselves and that our country is indeed the land of the free and the home of the brave". ■

**Richard Carwardine** is President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He is the author of the acclaimed biography *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (Knopf, 2006)

ALAMY





Lincoln believed that the Union was "the last, best hope of earth", so he was prepared to go to war to defend it and the values that it represented



# LINCOLN

## man on a mission

Why was the 16th president ready to engage in a civil war to preserve the Union, asks **Richard Carwardine**, and what was the fervent ideology that sustained him as he led the country through its moral and military crisis?

**O**N 14 APRIL 1865, the actor John Wilkes Booth pulled the trigger to send Abraham Lincoln to a premature grave – and, in doing so, shot a president at his moment of greatest triumph, just days after the end of the civil war that had quashed rebellion and begun the final emancipation of slaves.

Had he lived to see out his second term, Lincoln would surely have been ground down by the issues raised by national reconstruction, with inevitable consequences for his historical standing. But his murder – significantly, on Good Friday – saw him canonised as the martyr of the American Union. A contemporary journalist understood exactly what was at work in the aftermath of his shooting: “It has made it impossible to speak the truth of Abraham Lincoln hereafter.”

### The ‘Great Emancipator’

Lincoln’s death occasioned a torrent of sorrow not only at home but in the world at large. Messages of condolence emanated from national and municipal governments, and, more revealingly, from hundreds of voluntary organisations: churches, working men’s improvement societies, ragged schools, anti-slavery and temperance societies, and business and trade organisations.

The avalanche of tributes revealed the extent to which Lincoln had become a global figure. His political principles, his wartime leadership, his role as the ‘Great Emancipator’ and his resolute defence of popular

government spoke to people around the globe. The world’s embrace of Lincoln and what he represented may be seen as the counterpart of his own broad grasp of the world beyond the United States.

In his inaugural presidential address in 1861, Lincoln called the Union “this favoured land” – by implication, a nation superior to others. This was not a superiority based on muscle: during Lincoln’s lifetime, the United States remained a debtor nation that steered clear of “entangling alliances” with European powers and – while pursuing its own “continental empire” – had to accept Britain’s dominance of the seas.

Among the strands in the rope that bound Lincoln so resolutely to the Union was a deep faith in the nation’s natural bounty and physical grandeur. Growing up in Kentucky and Indiana, and arriving as a young man in the infant state of Illinois, Lincoln shared the faith of the emerging Whig party – championing an ambitious, federally sponsored programme of economic improvement – in the unique natural resources of the undeveloped country and the potential for its modernisation. As he told an audience in Springfield, the Illinois state capital, the American people possessed “the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate”.

Lincoln watched with pleasure the Union’s galloping economic progress, to which his political career in the 1830s and 1840s had been chiefly devoted, through the promotion of ambitious transport schemes, tariffs

to protect domestic manufacturing and improved credit facilities.

More often, however, Lincoln addressed the political purpose of the Union and the moral magnificence of institutions founded on the cornerstones of the Declaration of Independence, with its celebration of human equality, and the Federal Constitution, the guarantor of freedom. These legacies of the American Revolution had bequeathed the country a unique liberty (“far exceeding that of any other of the nations of the earth”), whose distinctive features included government by the consent of the governed, a bill of rights to ➤

### The legacies of the American Revolution had bequeathed the country a unique liberty



A group of workers – probably slaves – grinds sugar in Georgia

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, GETTY



➤ guarantee religious and civil freedoms, a legal system capped by a Supreme Court (“the most enlightened judicial tribunal in the world”), and a commitment to meritocracy (“to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life”).

In this he evinced his powerful sense of American exceptionalism. “Most governments have been based, practically, on the denial of equal rights of men,” he reflected in the mid-1850s. By contrast, “Ours began, by affirming those rights. They said, some men are too ignorant, and vicious, to share in government. Possibly so, said we; and, by your system, you would always keep them ignorant, and vicious. We proposed to give all a chance; and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together.”

## A romantic vision

To the modern eye, Lincoln’s celebration of the Union as an instrument of liberty and equality appears inconsistent – even hypocritical – given the reality of American slaveholding. By 1860, four million black slaves were held as property by southern whites. Their owners were mostly free to follow their own self-interests and appetites when it came to trading, disciplining and sexually abusing this unique species of ‘property’.

Lincoln resolved the conflict between the country’s progressive principles and the harsh reality of enslavement through his reading of history: the nation’s fathers had never intended that the “peculiar institution” should be permanent. Though they had seen no way of immediately eliminating it, he argued, the Founders had, however, taken steps to place slavery where “all sensible men understood, it was in the course of ultimate extinction”.

Lincoln was not a professed Christian, but he did share some of the optimism of Protestantism. He yoked temperance reform with the political emancipation of 1776 and an aspiration to freedom for the slaves: “And when the victory shall be complete – when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth – how proud the title of that Land, which may truly claim to be the birth-place and the cradle of both



Lincoln became a symbol of American freedom – as iconic as Lady Liberty, the bald eagle and the stars and stripes

those revolutions... How nobly distinguished that People, who shall have... nurtured to maturity, both the political and moral freedom of their species.”

Ultimately, Lincoln’s vision of the Union drew on a romantic feeling allied to a providential interpretation

## Lincoln’s devotion to the Union reached the intensity of religious mysticism

of the nation as being the Almighty’s “almost chosen people”. In his peroration to his first inaugural address he appealed to “the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land”.

It was this romantic attachment to Union, based on far more than the material benefits of nationhood, that the southern states so seriously underestimated. It led Alexander Stephens of Georgia, the Confederate vice-president, to reflect that Lincoln’s devotion to the Union reached the intensity of religious mysticism.

Lincoln’s powerful sense of America’s exceptional place in the world was not based on first-hand experience. Until his 19th year, when he took a flatboat to New Orleans, Lincoln knew only of the raw young communities of the upper south and midwest. Not until he was 38 did he travel east to the nation’s capital. Unlike several of his predecessors as president, Lincoln never ventured abroad. (He planned to do so after his presidency.)

Lincoln’s perspective on the world beyond the United States was shaped by the authors he read, the foreign-born visitors and citizens he met, and his more cosmopolitan associates. Above all, Lincoln was an inveterate reader of the newspaper press: this would be his key published source for the analysis of contemporary foreign affairs. His reading gave him a keen sense of the United States’ escape from the autocratic forces of the Old World, past and present.

The ideological legacy of the revolution fused with the defining foreign events of his own lifetime to give Lincoln a sharp appreciation of his country’s place in the world. Those events – above all, the independence movements led by Simón Bolívar and



his successors within Spain's New World empire, and the nationalist uprisings and movements of democratic protest in Europe in 1848 – were mediated for Lincoln through political friends and acquaintances who knew them at first hand.

Lincoln boasted no special expertise in the internal affairs of other nations, and they were rarely the theme of his political discourse. He did, however, take a capacious view of the foibles and aspirations of humankind. He was, above all, alert to the truth "that men of ambition and talents will... continue to spring up amongst us [and] naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion". Constitutions could not restrain "an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon".

Lincoln's conception of universal traits of human psychology and ambition was shaped and endorsed by his reading of the Scriptures and Shakespeare. In this universal struggle between liberty and tyranny, between social progress and lethargy, Lincoln conferred on the United States an international responsibility: "[A] new country is most favourable... to the immancipation of thought, and the consequent advancement of civilisation and the arts... In anciently inhabited countries, the dust of ages – a real downright old-fogyism – seems to... smother the intellects and energies of man."

### The cause of liberty

Lincoln's horizons stretched across the 19th-century world. When he spoke in December 1862 of the Union as the "last, best hope of earth" he was saying that the civil war constituted something more than an American crisis – that progressive forces throughout the world looked to the United States as an unequalled exemplar of liberty, and that it was the nation's mission to act as the improver of humankind.

Lincoln shared the conviction, common among his countrymen, that the American Union was "the world's best hope". He viewed the European nationalist and revolutionary movements of the mid-19th century – above all, in Hungary, Ireland, Germany and France – as part of "the general cause of republican liberty". But his understanding of America's

duty was shaped by Whig precepts, not those of the Democratic party, with its imperialist vision and stirring ideas of 'manifest destiny'.

Lincoln's capacious horizons explain why he was ready to engage in a war of daunting savagery to preserve the Union. When, in April 1861, South Carolina's secessionists turned their guns on the Union forces stationed at the federal fort in Charleston harbour, firing the first shots of that bloody conflict, they raised an issue that embraced, in the president's own words, "more than the fate of these United States".

Southern secession presented "to the whole family of man, the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy – a government of the people, by the same people – can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity, against its own domestic foes. It presents the question, whether discontented individuals... can always... arbitrarily... break up their government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon earth". These were sentiments he would affirm throughout the war, in the struggle "for a vast future".

This was no argument of mere convenience: it was the reiteration of his lifelong view that "The hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world rests upon the perpetuity of this Union". **H**

**Richard Carwardine** is President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He is the author of the acclaimed biography *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (Knopf, 2006).

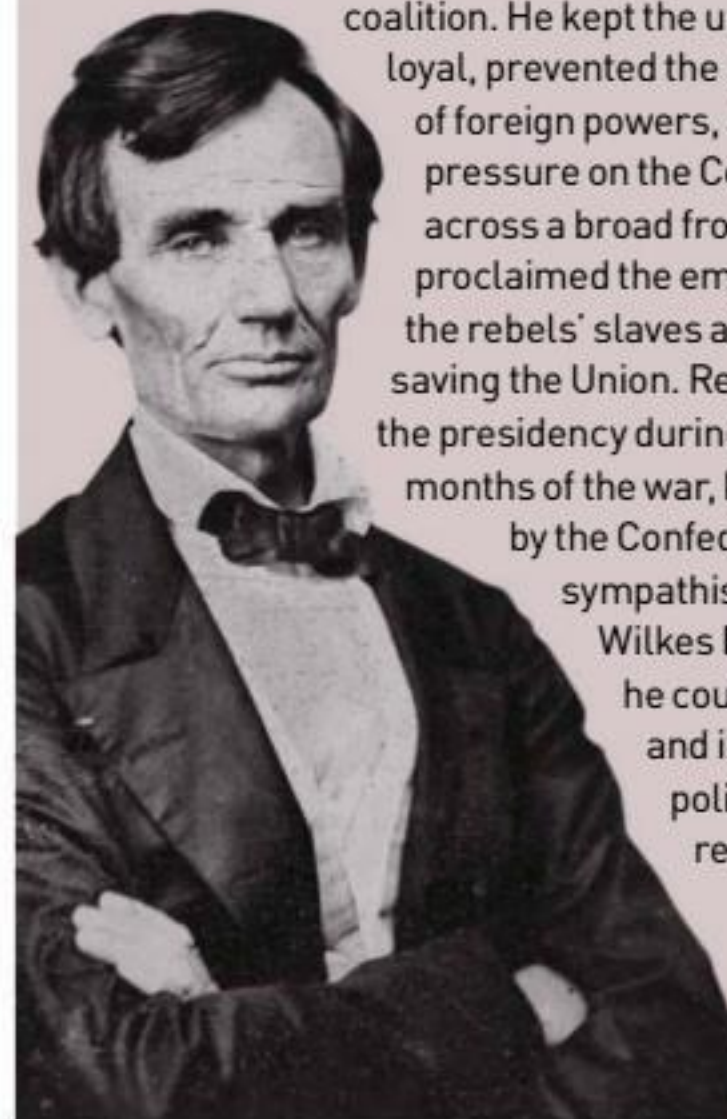
## The life of Abraham Lincoln

Born on 12 February 1809, Lincoln was raised in rural poverty in Kentucky and Indiana, moving to Illinois in 1830. Ambitious and self-educated, he practised as a lawyer in Springfield and served as a Whig in the state legislature before, after a term as US congressman, largely withdrawing from politics.

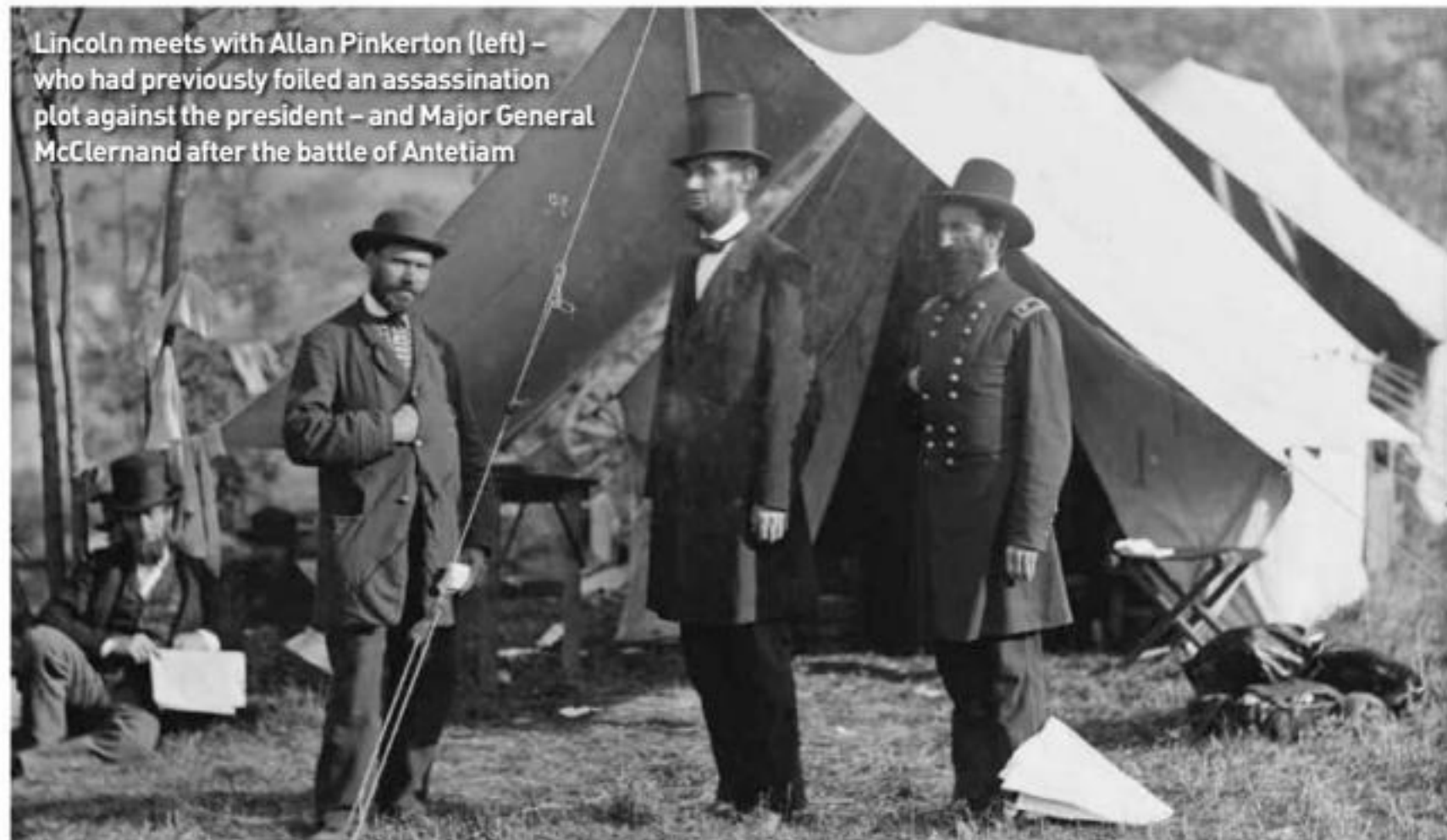
The threat of the spread of slavery west across the States rekindled his interest. Helping to organise the antislavery Republican party, he won national recognition in his 1858 debates with US senator Stephen Douglas, and secured his party's nomination for president in 1860.

His election victory prompted the secession of the lower south. In the subsequent resort to arms, Lincoln grew into the role of commander-in-chief and skillfully held together a fragile war coalition. He kept the upper south

loyal, prevented the intervention of foreign powers, kept military pressure on the Confederacy across a broad front, and proclaimed the emancipation of the rebels' slaves as a means of saving the Union. Re-elected to the presidency during the final months of the war, he was shot by the Confederate sympathiser John Wilkes Booth before he could develop and implement his policy of national reconstruction.



**Lincoln:** commander, statesman, leader



Lincoln meets with Allan Pinkerton (left) – who had previously foiled an assassination plot against the president – and Major General McClelland after the battle of Antietam



# ... PART TWO ...

## THE STORY OF THE WAR

By 1861, the United States had been launched into a vicious civil war that would last four years – the next stage would be characterised by ferocious battles, with heavy defeats and hard-won victories for both sides

### 11 Battle of Bull Run, 1861

ONE OF THE main reasons a political conflict turned to war was that, in 1861, the vast majority of Americans were not trying to seek an accommodation; they wanted a fight. A few wise heads on both sides knew that once war came it would be long and costly. For many, though, resorting to violence was not a sign of failure but a manly, healthy, possibly even purifying way of resolving an intractable conflict.

The Confederate government was established in Richmond, Virginia, less than 100 miles due south of Washington. Northern newspapers emblazoned, "Forward to Richmond!" atop their editorial pages. Volunteer troops gathered in Washington in their makeshift uniforms. On all sides the

expectation was that one quick and decisive battle would probably decide the fate of the rebellion.

Instead, the first big confrontation between North and South was a chaotic battle outside Washington, near Bull Run creek, on 21 July 1861. The cavalry on both sides seemingly operated at random, certainly without any proper co-ordination with infantry attacks. Troops mistook units on their own side for the enemy. After an inconclusive few hours of fighting, the Union army was sent into a panic-stricken retreat by a Confederate attack.

The losses in this first great conflict were tiny compared to the carnage of later battles, yet at the time casualty figures of 1,982



**First blood**  
The battle of Bull Run revealed organisational weaknesses on both sides

Confederate troops and 2,896 Union soldiers shocked both sides profoundly. While southerners rejoiced at victory, northerners were forced to confront for the first time the scale of the undertaking they had so blithely embraced.



**Ready for combat** Leading his army to fight General Lee, General George B McClellan is cheered by Union supporters

### 12 Strategy and tactics

IN GRAND STRATEGIC terms, the Union needed to be on the offensive in order to conquer the South. Yet the South took the offensive whenever it could. General Lee invaded Maryland and Pennsylvania in the summers of 1862 and 1863, taking the war onto northern soil, in part because there was huge popular pressure on both sides to be seen to be on the attack.

However, technological innovations gave defending forces much greater tactical strength. Whereas in the Mexican War the army was still using smooth-bore muskets, by 1861 the use of rifled muskets and new conical-shaped bullets called Minié balls greatly increased the accuracy of firepower from a longer range. Towards the end of the war, entrenchments and barbed wire – notably in the long siege of Petersburg – made the conflict resemble the Western Front in the First World War.

Nevertheless, offensives against well-defended positions could still succeed when commanders not only had a numerical advantage but were also prepared to be persistent and flexible – as Grant and Sherman proved in 1864, and as British generals on the Western Front learned after 1916.



## 13 The Union army and slavery

FROM THE MOMENT war began, abolitionists argued that a conflict caused by slaveholders could only be ended by ending slavery, the "taproot of the rebellion". But other northerners vowed they wouldn't support an 'abolition war'. The official line from Lincoln was clear: this was a war to restore the Union, with no other aim.

Yet the reality on the ground in the south meant the Union army had to make de facto decisions about whether to encourage the dismantling of slavery. Wherever there was a Union military presence in a slave state, enslaved people sought sanctuary. Some Union generals sent them back to their 'owners'. Others allowed them to stay, and refugee camps grew up around military camps.

It was General Benjamin F Butler, in command of a Union-held enclave in Virginia, who found a way of protecting runaway slaves without publicly challenging the official line that the Union did not seek emancipation. In the summer of 1861, he announced that any fugitive slave who sought refuge with his forces would be held as "contraband of war".

This phrase deftly turned the argument that slaves were property against southerners. Just as horses or guns, if captured, could legitimately be impounded since they were likely to be of military value to the enemy then so too 'human property', likely to be used to dig fortifications or supply the Confederate army, could be seized – and effectively freed. Contraband became the normal term to describe runaway slaves for the rest of the war. As the debate about emancipation raged in the north, the reality was always that, intentionally or otherwise, the Union army was an instrument of emancipation.

### No going back

General Benjamin F Butler classed runaway slaves as "contraband", allowing him to free them without seeming to favour emancipation



**Fierce battle** Shiloh, Ulysses S Grant later said, convinced him of the need to annihilate the Confederate army to win the war

## 14 Battle of Shiloh, 1862

MOST OF THE press attention was on the eastern theatre of the war in Virginia. But in the first phase of the war, during the winter and spring of 1861–2, there was little action in the east as General-in-Chief George B McClellan, a man of enormous self-confidence who rejoiced in the moniker "the Little Napoleon", painstakingly drilled and built up his troops.

Meanwhile in the west, Union commanders made big gains in a plan to force Confederate forces out of Kentucky and Tennessee, and then take control of the Mississippi River. In particular, General Ulysses S Grant was stunningly successful at putting this strategy into practice. He captured Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, opening up the

southward-flowing Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers to the Union. These brilliant successes were followed, on 6–7 April 1862, by a major battle at Shiloh in southwestern Tennessee. Grant's forces were surprised by a Confederate force under Albert Sidney Johnston and PGT Beauregard but, in the bloodiest battle of the war to that point, the Union army held its ground, helped by the timely arrival of reinforcements.

The outcome of Shiloh was that a Confederate counter-offensive had been thwarted, albeit at heavy cost. Grant was initially criticised for his part in the battle, but when Lincoln was urged to remove him from command, he replied, "I can't spare this man, he fights."



## 15 The Trent affair

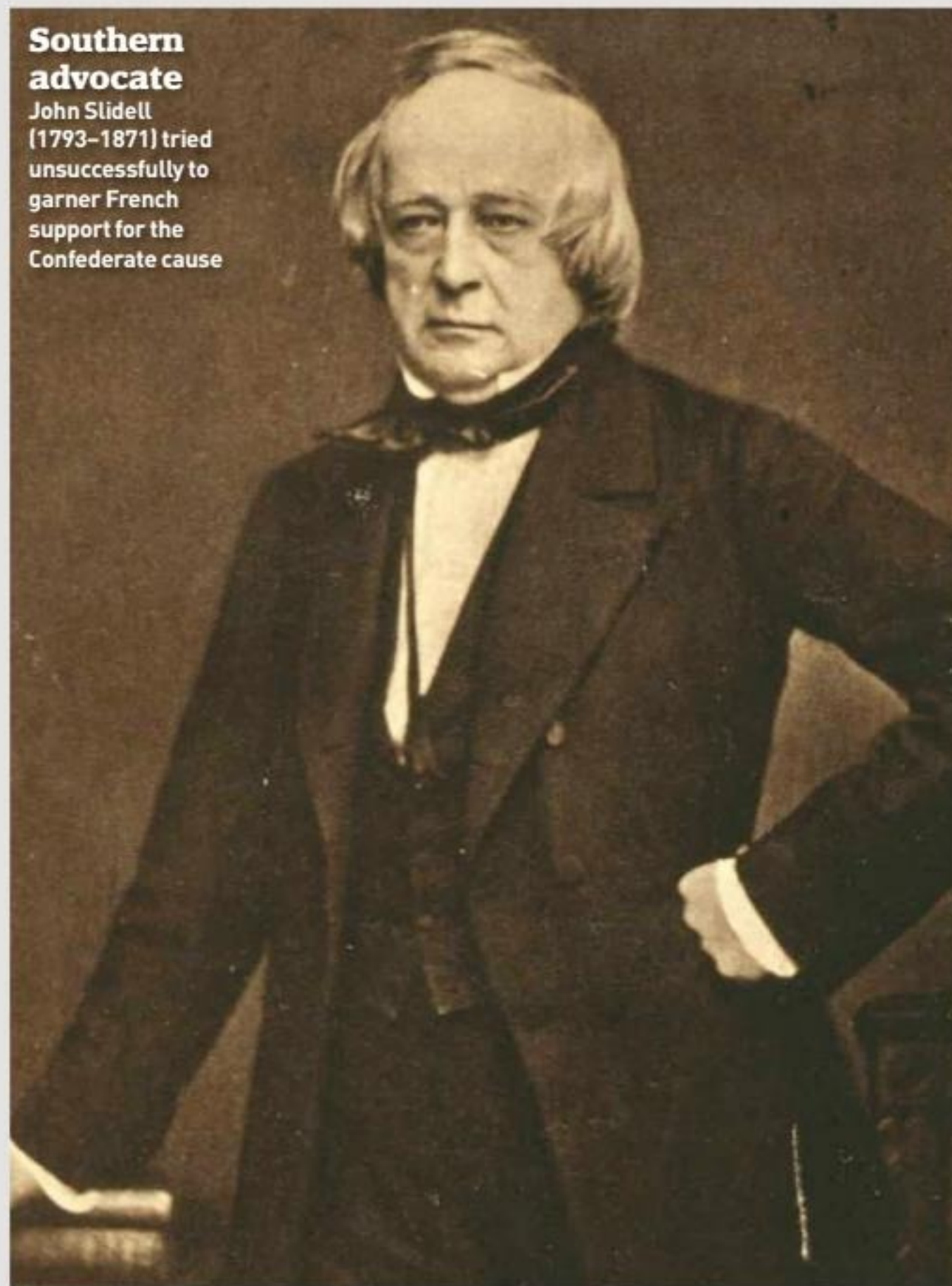
THE GREATEST DANGER of war between Britain and the USA came from a conflict over the rights of British shipping. The US Navy tried to seize British merchant vessels bound for neutral ports near the Confederate coast, such as the Bahamas or Cuba, on the grounds that cargo was then to be transferred to southern blockade-runners. On occasion, the US succeeded. Britain had done much the same to American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars, and at the time the US had protested fiercely (the issue was one of the triggers of the war of 1812). Now the roles were reversed.

The conflict came to a head on 8 November 1861, when sailors from the USS *San Jacinto* boarded a British ship, RMS *Trent*, 300 miles east of Havana, and removed two Confederate envoys, James Mason and John Slidell, en route to Europe to press Britain and France for support. The British government was furious at the violation of its flag and there was talk of war. The diplomatic row was defused after US secretary of state William Seward apologised and released the envoys, insisting as he did so that the case proved that the British had finally accepted the United States' conception of neutral shipping rights.

The larger issue was what role Britain might play in the war. Northerners were frustrated by British recognition of the South as a belligerent power (although Britain never gave the Confederacy diplomatic recognition) and angry about blockade-running ships and a couple of naval vessels that were built in British ports. The Confederacy for its part hoped the cotton embargo would precipitate European intervention of the kind that had tipped the balance for the rebels in the War of Independence. It never came.

### Southern advocate

John Slidell (1793–1871) tried unsuccessfully to garner French support for the Confederate cause



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X4

**Testing times** In the Peninsula Campaign of spring 1862, the Union troops, seen here, suffered a series of crushing defeats

## 16 The Peninsula Campaign

IN THE PENINSULA Campaign of the spring of 1862, Union commander George B McClellan launched the Army of the Potomac in what he hoped would be the decisive move against the Confederacy. Rather than taking the direct approach due south, troops were sent by sea to the mouth of the James River from where they approached the Confederate capital Richmond from the east in a bid to evade Confederate defences.

McClellan, who was fiercely opposed to emancipation, hoped to fight a limited war according to the "highest principles known to Christian civilisation". At first the plan seemed to go well as Confederate forces fell back. But then General Robert E Lee took field command of the Army of Northern Virginia for the first time. An

undemonstrative taciturn man, Lee was to about to prove himself one of the wildest, most courageous and most effective commanders of the war. He believed the Confederacy could counter the manpower advantage of the Union army only by seizing and keeping the initiative.

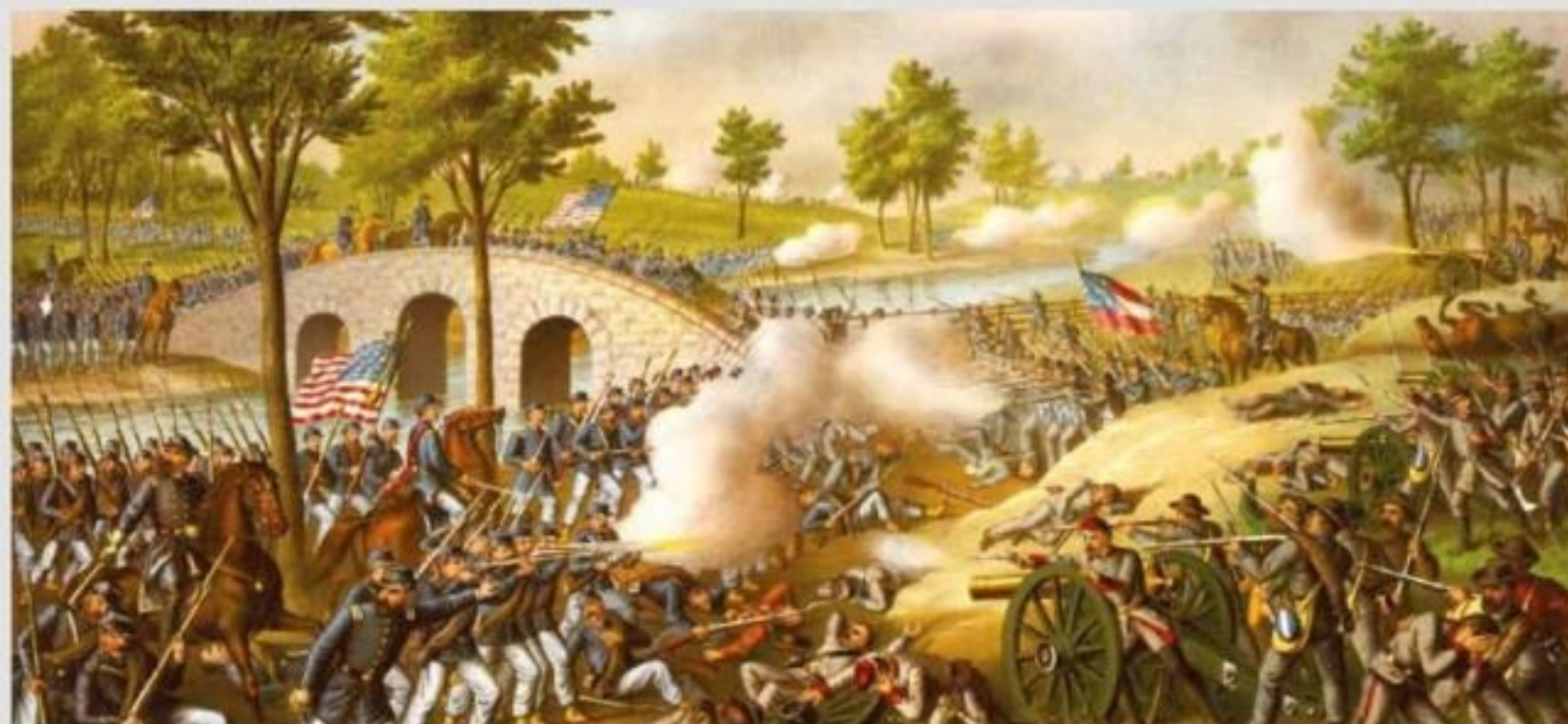
In a stunning series of victories known as the Seven Days Battles, Lee's leadership transformed the Confederacy's position in one week, forcing McClellan's army back. Thereafter officers and men in the Army of the Potomac developed what almost amounted to an inferiority complex in the face of Lee's army, a spell that was only partially broken a year later at Gettysburg. McClellan's star waned after the Peninsula Campaign and with him the idea the war could be fought in a 'limited' way.



## 17 Battle of Antietam, 1862

IN SEPTEMBER 1862, Lee launched the first of his two grand raids into the north. In optimistic moments, Confederate leaders hoped Lee's invasion might persuade Maryland slaveholders to support the South and foreign powers to recognise it, but at the very least they wanted to prove the North could never subdue the South militarily.

The 'invasion' culminated in a battle at Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland, on 17 September. The conflict was a fluid, confused and messy affair, with friendly fire compounding the difficulties of communication on a large battle area where no one had more than a partial view of the fighting. Particular spots on the battlefield acquired an especially



**Northern excursion** Antietam was a strategic victory for the Union, but won at huge cost

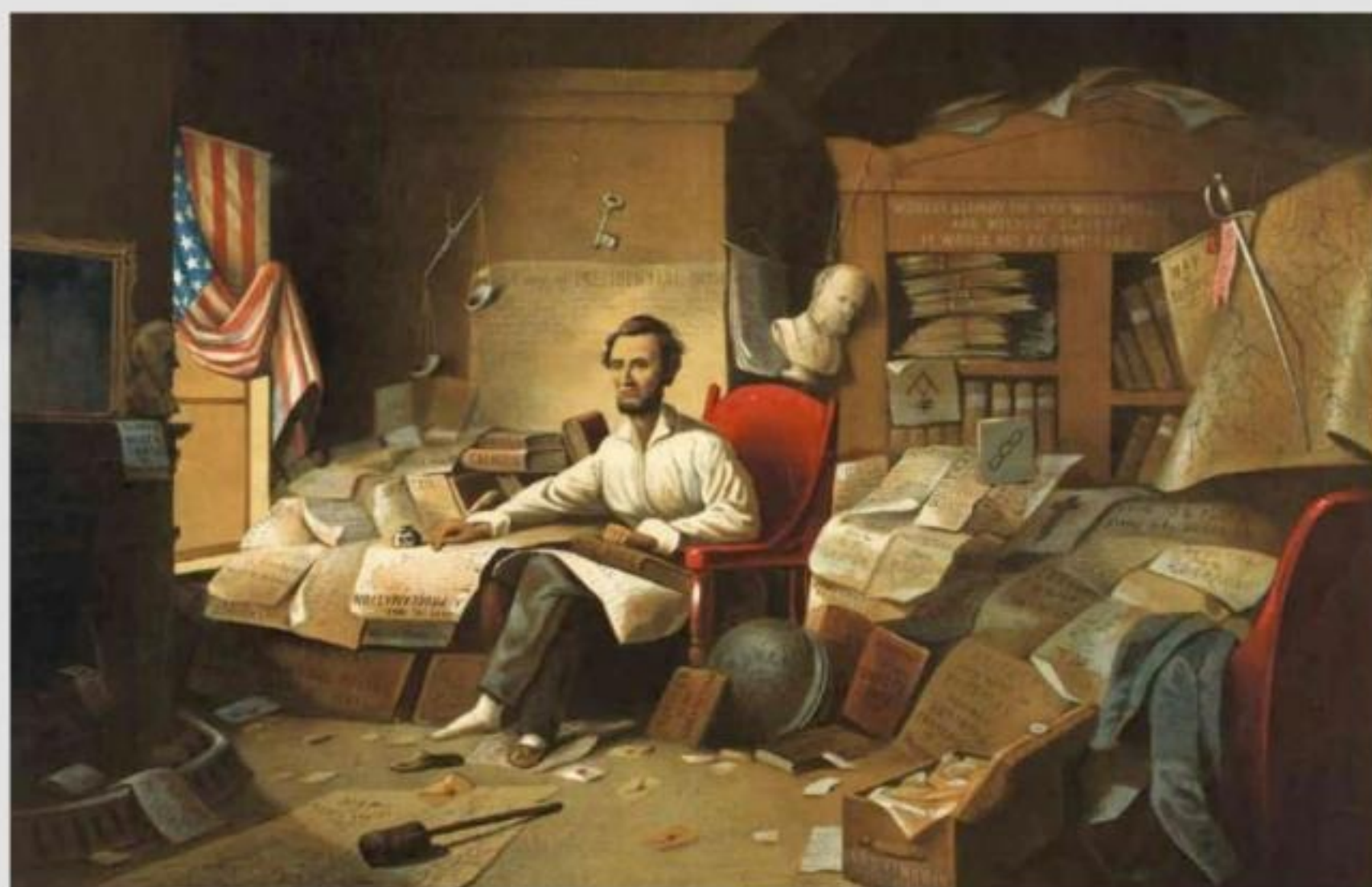
gruesome reputation, including Miller's cornfield, which changed hands six times in just a few hours, and 'Bloody Lane', a sunken road from which the rebel South held the attacking forces of the North at bay for over three hours in late morning.

By nightfall, at the cost of around 23,000 casualties, the Confederate line had been pushed back a few hundred yards. Still, it was a victory for the Union, although to Lincoln's frustration McClellan failed to pursue Lee's forces after the battle.

## 18 The Emancipation Proclamation

THE LIMITED UNION victory at Antietam was to be the final battle of the first phase of the war. Just a few days later, on 22 September 1862, Lincoln issued a proclamation stating that if, by 1 January 1863, the rebel states of the Confederacy had not returned to the Union, the United States would, from that date onwards, regard slaves held in rebel areas as free. This Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation had an incendiary effect. It was an ultimatum to the South: return to the Union within 100 days with slavery intact, or face total destruction.

Confederate leader Jefferson Davis called it "the most execrable measure in the history of guilty man". The three-month delay was intended to send a clear message that emancipation was a tool of war rather than an end in itself. Like a riot policeman giving notice that a mob was about to be fired upon if it did not disperse, Lincoln wanted to give the appearance of due process. But no one had any illusions: the President had tied the Union's fate to emancipation.



**Loneliness of power** David Gilmour Blythe's depiction of Lincoln writing the Emancipation Proclamation

On 1 January 1863, the president duly issued the Emancipation Proclamation. It applied only to those areas of the United States that were still in arms against the government and much of the document was taken up with a list of counties in rebel states that, because they were no longer under

rebel control, were exempted from the proclamation. Lincoln took a political and strategic risk in coupling together the fate of the Union with the fate of slavery. In some Union regiments there were near-mutinies at the news. But abolitionists rejoiced that at last the day of jubilee was at hand.



## 19 Emancipation and racial attitudes in the Union Army

UNION SOLDIERS COMMONLY used terms such as 'darkie' and 'nigger' in their letters. Even proudly antislavery soldiers exhibited an unquestioning racism. There was no contradiction in holding racist views while also thinking that a war against secession was inherently a war against slavery, and that the Confederacy was a repressive society that challenged American values of freedom and opportunity.

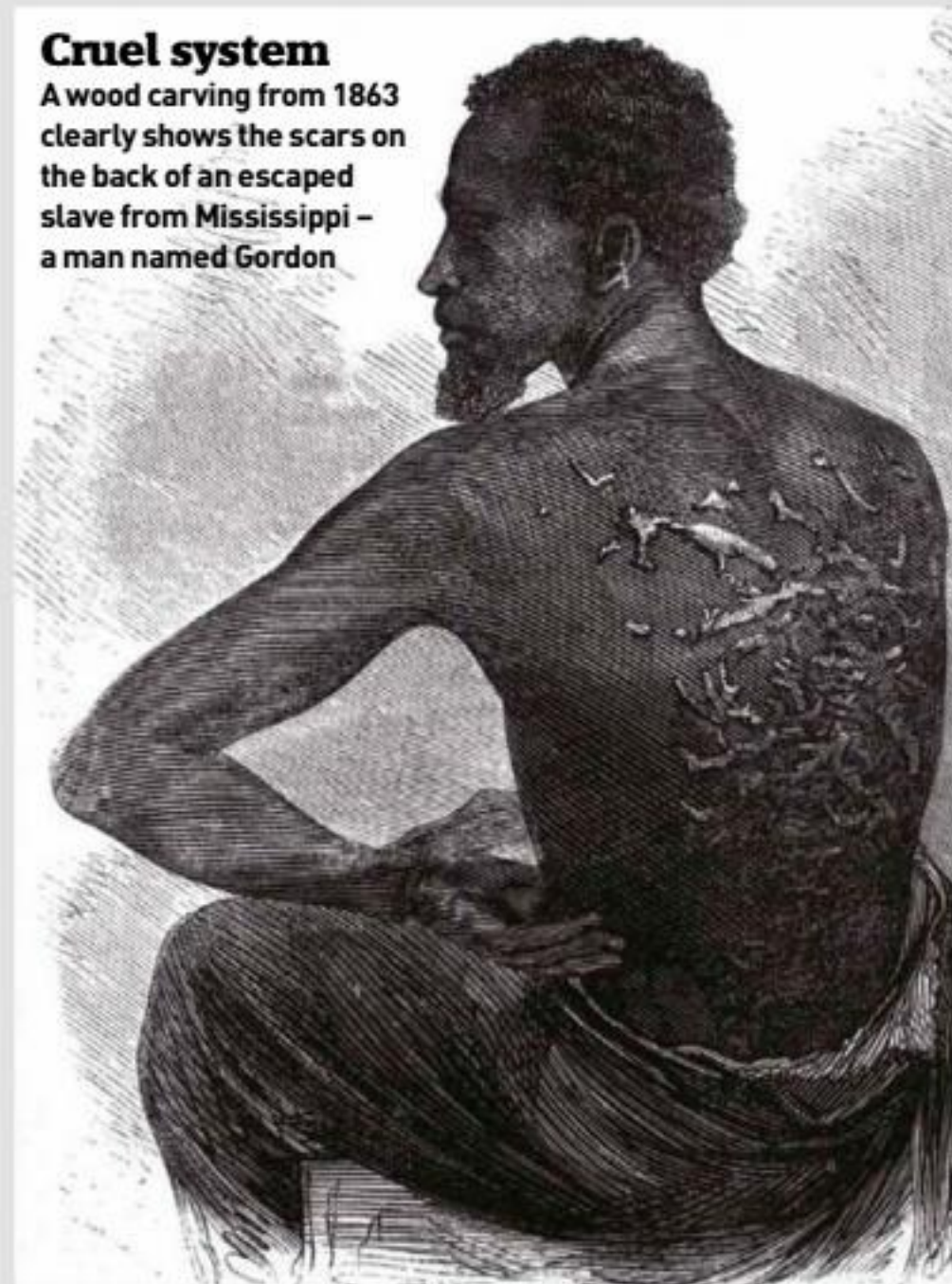
Encounters with runaway slaves had a dramatic impact on some Union soldiers. Black people were exotic and fascinating to rural farm boys from the north. In addition, many soldiers interpreted their encounters with freed slaves in the light of what they had heard and read of the cruelties of slavery. Private Chauncey Cooke wrote to

his mother in Wisconsin about "a toothless old slave with one blind eye" who told him horrific stories of his wife and children having been sold, of whippings and being hunted by bloodhounds when he tried to escape. The stories, Cooke wrote, were "just like the ones in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and I believe them".

Some Union troops were convinced by evangelical preachers and antislavery propaganda that expunging the sin of slavery would redeem their country in God's eyes. Some simply wanted black troops to be placed in the front line instead of them. Most were probably convinced by the much more pragmatic case that if the rebels hated emancipation, then it must be a good thing, a weapon to strike at the heart of southern society.

### Cruel system

A wood carving from 1863 clearly shows the scars on the back of an escaped slave from Mississippi – a man named Gordon



## 20 Battle of Fredericksburg, 1862

AFTER ANTIETAM, GENERAL Ambrose E Burnside replaced George B McClellan as the commander of the Army of the Potomac. He assumed command of the army's 120,000 men on 7 November 1862, and President

Lincoln urged him to launch a fresh assault on Richmond immediately.

Burnside's immense army was well supplied and even had hot-air balloons for surveillance, so he should have been able to outgun the Confederates. However it seemed

that his troops could not outmanoeuvre the enemy. General Burnside's plan was to cross the Rappahannock river above the town of Fredericksburg, which lay on the direct route from Washington to Richmond. A delay in the arrival of pontoon bridges meant that before the Union army had even crossed the river, General Lee had time to concentrate his troops on the heights behind Fredericksburg. The Army of the Potomac eventually made it across the river on 13 December 1862, but could get no further. In repeated assaults up the gentle rise of Marye's Heights, line after line of the North's soldiers were cut down. The Union suffered more than 12,500 casualties in the day-long battle, and gained almost no ground.

Once the news of Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg broke, it seemed to inaugurate the bleakest period of the entire civil war for the North. President Lincoln summed up the Union's perspective in one succinct line: "If there is a worse place than Hell, I am in it," he told a visitor when the reports of the debacle came through.



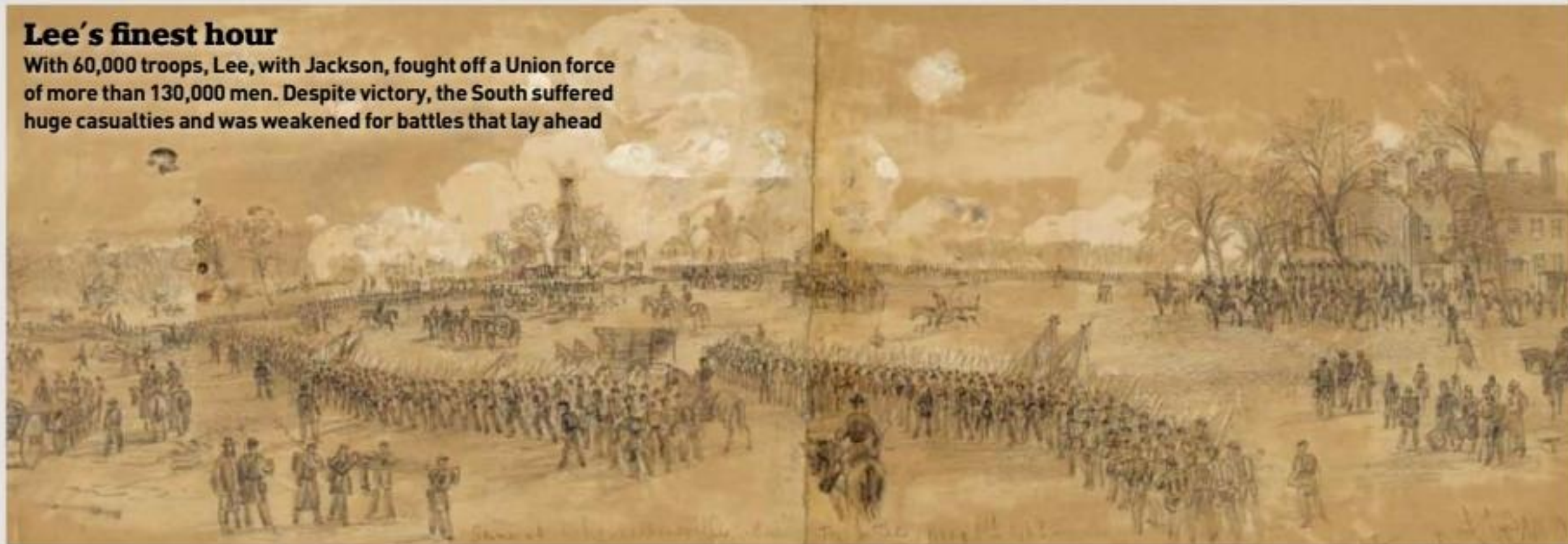
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X4

**Thwarted** Despite a strong numerical advantage, the Union was unable to take Fredericksburg in 1862



**Lee's finest hour**

With 60,000 troops, Lee, with Jackson, fought off a Union force of more than 130,000 men. Despite victory, the South suffered huge casualties and was weakened for battles that lay ahead



## 21 Battle of Chancellorsville, 1863

ON 30 APRIL 1863, yet another Union commander, Joseph Hooker, crossed the Rappahannock River and tried to fight his way to Richmond. Hooker's thinking was more subtle than Burnside's – he crossed the river to the west of Fredericksburg with the aim of attacking the Confederates from the side – but the plan failed in its execution. Audaciously, Lee, ably supported by General 'Stonewall'

Jackson, divided his army in the face of superior numbers and outflanked Union troops. In a three-day battle, Hooker made error after error, mistaking Jackson's flanking movement for a retreat and finally abandoning the one piece of high ground from which artillery could be used effectively in wooded, undulating country.

The relief of victory for the South was tempered by the death of Jackson, who was accidentally fired on by his own men, prompting an outpouring of grief that transformed the dead general

into a martyred hero. In retrospect, the battle of Chancellorsville was the high-tide mark of Confederate military success. It was certainly the apogee of Lee's military career. Once again, his army had outsmarted and out-fought a larger, better-equipped Union force. But Hooker's inept leadership had been a major factor in the southern victory, and such incompetence could not be relied upon indefinitely. The Confederates suffered huge losses and the difference in the size of the armies could be disguised by smart tactics only for so long.

**Missed chance?**

General Meade (1815–72), who led Union troops to victory at Gettysburg, was criticised for not pursuing Lee's force as it retreated

## 22 Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, 1863

IN THE FIRST days of July 1863, two simultaneous military victories for the Union seemed to turn the tide in the war. The Confederates had launched another raid into the north, this time up the Shenandoah Valley and into the state of Pennsylvania. General George Meade, the latest commander of the Army of the Potomac, led the forces that finally defeated Lee in a fight at Gettysburg during 1–3 July.

Lee's army retreated back into Virginia but a spell of invincibility had been broken. Lee's army never fully recovered from Gettysburg, in spirit or in numbers. His officer corps and command structure were hit especially hard. Never again in the war would Lee be able to rely on his officers as he had done in 1862. In 1864, he had to appear in

person on the front lines to rally troops, which was something that he hadn't done in previous years.

Meanwhile in the west, General Grant scored a major breakthrough. On 4 July, after more than six weeks, of failed assaults, Grant accepted the surrender of Confederate forces in the fortified river town of Vicksburg, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi. With New Orleans having fallen the previous year after an assault from the sea, the South was now split into two halves.

▶▶▶ Turn to page 70 to find out how riots, speeches and sieges led to Confederate surrender in the final chapter of The Story of the War



# WHEN WAR CAME CALLING

Fought largely on southern soil, the civil war deeply affected civilian life in the Confederacy, says **David Anderson**. It tore families apart, left children destitute, meant new roles for women and brought challenges for black and white alike

**S**HORTLY AFTER ROBERT E Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House on 9 April 1865, Kate Stone, an insightful and erudite southern woman, began her journal entry by acknowledging that momentous occasion.

"Conquered, Submission, Subjugation are words that burn into my heart, and yet I feel that we are doomed to know them in all their bitterness," she confessed. With her mother, five brothers and younger sister, Kate had fled Brokenburn, the family plantation in northeastern Louisiana, to Mississippi and then to Texas during the American Civil War. Confederate defeat and the untimely deaths of two of her brothers made the swirl of history unbearable.

"Our glorious struggle of the last four years, our hardships, our sacrifices, and worst of all, the torrents of noble blood that have been shed for our loved Country – all, all in vain," she wailed. "The best and the bravest of the South sacrificed – and for nothing." Overcome by grief, Kate wanted only to forget.

In the immediate aftermath of the Confederate artillery bombardment of Fort Sumter in 1861 and Lincoln's subsequent appeal to northern state governors for 75,000 troops, the rhetoric of many white southerners had been so different. Twenty years

old when war began, Kate began her diary in May 1861, as Confederate regiments formed amid eager fanfare, southern men inspired by dreams of glory and the thrilling adventure that lay ahead. Ill-prepared for military discipline, their lack of martial experience made the horrors of modern warfare incomprehensible. Nevertheless, Confederate volunteers were impatient to come to blows with the enemy, to defend homes, property and honour against cowardly Yankee invaders.

---

## ARKANSAS "Some of my dear brethren are stripped of nearly everything by these northern invaders"

William H Barksdale, 19 July 1862

---

In those early months, Kate's diary entries illuminate the conviction in southern independence as a riposte to northern belligerence towards southern values and interests. "We should make a stand for our rights and a nation fighting for its own homes and liberty cannot be overwhelmed," she explained. "Our Cause is just and must prevail."

These sentiments – with a cacophony of other voices greeting the sectional crisis with a similar poise and confidence – contrast sharply with the insecurities and uncertainties expressed by many Confederate soldiers and civilians at war's end, with their dream of an independent southern republic in ruins and their social and economic system torn apart.

### War on southern soil

Over the past several decades, historians have examined a rich and wide variety of sources – from official documents to private correspondence – to offer new perspectives on specific features of the Confederate home front experience during the civil war. Less concerned with battles, campaigns and military leadership and ranging broadly in analytical focus, much of this scholarly discussion has sought to understand the consequential impact that internecine war had upon the south's citizenry – men and women, rich and poor, white and black.

Because it was fought almost exclusively on southern soil, the civil war directly affected southern civilian life. Perhaps the most obvious effect was that the conflict turned tens of thousands of planters, yeomen and poor whites into soldiers. At first, men volunteered but then conscription began (albeit with





Patriotic men eagerly volunteered, as shown here at Woodstock, Virginia – but their absence was keenly felt across the south

exemptions related to occupation). Although most Confederate soldiers were native born and subsistence farmers, southern men from a variety of social backgrounds and occupations served, including skilled labourers and professionals.

Service in the Confederate armed forces deeply affected southern home life and imposed major changes on the domestic environment. Familial duty and patriotic obligation ensured few households avoided the loss of husbands and sons to the fight, while at the same time bearing the material hardships and socio-economic disruptions to sustain the war effort.

“Now, in the condition to which our country is now plunged,” a Virginian impressed upon his cousin, “it is the duty of every man, woman and child who can understand the difference between Liberty and Vassalism, to do all in their power no matter what that may be... and assist in driving back the foe.”

As historian James M McPherson has observed, the outbreak of hostilities brought into sharp focus southern men’s “dual responsibilities to country and family by the conviction that in fighting for one they were protecting the other,” particularly after major Union offensives into southern territory in 1862. An Alabama cavalryman and father to seven

children wrote to his wife upon learning that one of the children had died: “If it were not for the love of my country and family and the patriotism that burns in my bosom for them I would be glad to come home and stay there but I know I have as much to fight for as anybody else.”

Many soldier husbands and sons clung tenaciously to reminders of home and loved ones now far away. Homesickness struck those displaced from home and hearth with remarkable consistency, as letters and newspapers – even sentimental music – both shrank and magnified its anguish.

In 1861, many southern women had been forthright in their defence

of the southern cause and noisily encouraged their husbands, brothers and sons to enlist, willing them to satisfy the demands of southern manhood in an honorific society.

The absence of men from southern families, communities and states exerted a toll on those left behind on farms and in towns and cities. Confederate wives, sisters and daughters, limited to subordinate roles and activities in antebellum society, suddenly gained new and unprecedented responsibilities with the outbreak of the civil war. These responsibilities were well outside the parameters of what was considered appropriate for 19th-century American women.

### New roles for women

With so many men away, white women across the Confederacy’s few urban areas and rural communities assumed the practical and financial management of plantations, farms and businesses, adding to prescribed, traditional roles such as child rearing and tending to crops and livestock. Affluent planters’ wives and other elite women engaged in voluntary and fundraising activities to provision Confederate soldiers with food, clothes and other necessities.

Moreover, white women volunteered as nurses, which

**VIRGINIA “[When freedom came] we was dancin’ an’ prancin’ an’ yellin’ wid a big barn fir [bonfire] jus’ ablazin’ an’ de white folks not darin’ to come outside de big house”**

Annie Harris, a former slave



➤ hitherto had been a traditionally male vocation. In hastily erected army hospitals at home or close to the front lines, nurses such as Edinburgh-born Kate Cumming and Phoebe Yates Pember of South Carolina cared for thousands of Confederate wounded during the war.

### The poor hit hardest

Although southern white women of all social classes struggled to support themselves and their families, the Confederacy's poor whites were hit especially hard by the collapse of Confederate infrastructure and productive capacity as war dragged on. Some, particularly widows, were so overwhelmed that they abandoned their homes and farms, living as nomadic refugees, or in penury dependent upon charity or the benevolence of others to sustain their families. A South Carolina newspaper wrote "The duties of war have called away from home the sole supports of many, many families... Help must be given, or the poor will suffer."

Pleading their case to Zebulon Vance, Governor of North Carolina, impoverished women from Bladen County petitioned that they faced starvation because of increased costs and "determd to have bredd [bread] out of these barns & that at a price that we can pay." The cumulative effect of runaway inflation, food

shortages and high prices led groups of destitute women to riot in Richmond and other cities, and seize food from shops and warehouses.

The south's largest plantations, with an enslaved labour force of over three million, grew cash crops such as cotton and tobacco, exacerbating the food problem. As one incidence of internal dissent, these riots served to magnify social tensions in the Confederacy and weaken support for southern independence, leading

## TENNESSEE "When I shall have made up my mind to go to hell, I will cut my throat, and go direct, and not travel round by way of the Southern Confederacy"

William G 'Parson' Brownlow, southern unionist

many soldiers – often at the insistence of their wives – to desert and return home to take care of their farms and families.

The impact on those civilians living in the midst of war in the Confederacy's slave-holding border states was especially marked.

Communities in Tennessee and Virginia, agricultural heartland and major food producing regions where much of the early fighting took place, had to tolerate marauding Union armies and were forced to live under Union occupation.

In Georgia and the Carolinas, where late in 1864 the Union's General Sherman waged psychological warfare against an increasingly war-weary population, total war impacted disastrously on southern economic and military infrastructure. Where political divisions between secessionists and unionists ran deep – such as western Virginia and eastern Tennessee, and in Missouri and Kentucky, two states that had not seceded from the Union – the civil war bitterly divided households, setting father against son and brother against brother. Kentucky Senator John J Crittenden's sons, for example, fought on opposing sides, both rising to the rank of general.

The civil war, in profound ways, affected America's children. Historian James Marten writes that it politicised children on both sides of the conflict, influencing "how they viewed the world, their country, their communities, and themselves." Southern children experienced privation and suffering as a dearth of food, fuel and clothing behind the lines affected the material condition of southern families.

Christmas highlighted the yawning chasm between prewar plenty and wartime want. The daughter of a Georgia plantation widow was left bitterly disappointed one Christmas morning when she



ALAMY, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Southern women found new roles, especially in nursing, which would have been restricted in pre-war society



Hungry and helpless – with men away at war, destitute women rioted for bread



The gradual collapse of slavery meant great changes in the lives of slaves. Large numbers were scattered to camps, such as this one in Richmond, Virginia, in 1865



leapt from her bed to unwrap her presents. Upon finding her Christmas stocking empty, “she crept back into her bed, pulled the cover over her face,” and began to cry. Toys and decorations were usually homemade because of crippling prices and the effectiveness of the Union blockade at curtailing commercial traffic through the Confederacy’s ports and harbours.

### Yankees shot Santa

To lift the children’s spirits, one ingenious Richmond family decorated their Christmas tree with the ears and tails of butchered hogs; the tails garlanded with paper, the ears doubling as candle holders. Common gifts included various fruits and assortments of nuts, candy, popcorn and cakes. Others were not so lucky. General Howell Cobb’s children were told that nefarious Yankees had shot Santa Claus.

Following the battle of Antietam in September 1862, Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, which would take effect on New Year’s Day 1863, allowing blacks to fight to secure their own freedom. Now as much a war to preserve the Union as one to end slavery, the issuance of the Proclamation, which would free

only those slaves in the Confederate states still in rebellion, effectively ended Confederate hopes that the strength and influence of ‘King Cotton’ might secure diplomatic recognition from Europe, particularly Britain and France.

The gradual collapse of slavery, the south’s ‘peculiar institution’, wrought immediate and radical changes in the lives of slaves, at once scattering large

their concerns. Other slave owners were troubled by northern influence over slave fidelity, as with serious manpower shortages the task of overseeing plantation slaves fell to white women who struggled to contend with increasing slave disobedience and refusal to work, thus further depleting southern agricultural output.

The 11 Confederate states, with a population of around 9 million (a third of whom were slaves), stood against 22 million northerners and were overwhelmed in terms of manufacturing capacity and mass transportation facilities. Efforts to understand the Confederacy’s fight for survival and eventual collapse have supported new ideas among civil war scholars in discussing how we should understand the history of the Confederate home front. This has enhanced awareness of the challenges white and black southerners faced according to geographic location and most significantly by race, class and gender over four long years of war. **H**

**Dr David Anderson** is lecturer in American Studies at Swansea University, specialising in the social and cultural history of the south before, during and after the American Civil War

## LOUISIANA “In these few months my childhood had slipped from me, never to return”

Céline Frémaux Garcia, aged 12, an inhabitant of Port Hudson, Louisiana, prior to its siege in 1863

numbers of husbands, wives and their children to camps, and reuniting families separated by sale or the dislocation of war.

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Virginians worried that “the slave population is becoming restless and discontented” and wrote to the Confederate government to express



# DRAWN TO AMERICA

## Foreign volunteers in the civil war

Armies in both north and south attracted thousands of recruits from overseas, says **Amanda Foreman**. Whether driven by idealism or attracted by large cash bounties, these immigrants made the fight their own and altered their lives forever

**I**T HAS LONG been a truism that thousands of foreigners fought in the civil war. The South complained bitterly that the North's ability to recruit foreign volunteers – and pay them bounties – meant the cards were stacked against the Confederacy from the start. But while no one has ever disputed the fact that a large number of northern volunteers came from overseas, producing the numbers to back this claim is not straightforward.

Two obstacles make the data difficult to interpret. While muster rolls reveal a great deal about a soldier's identity – birthplace, physical description, date of enlistment and war record – nowhere does it say when a soldier came to America. This makes it impossible to identify those who came over specifically to fight. Second, there is a huge disparity between the number of surviving service records for the Union army compared to those for the Confederate. The voice of the victor speaks loudest.

Still, even with all the gaps and question marks that abound, it is possible to create a rough picture of the two armies. We know from the 1860 census that there were 31,433,321 people living in the United States

just before the war broke out. A little more than four million of them had been born abroad. The majority of these foreign-born Americans lived in the north; only about 233,650 lived in the south. When it came to volunteering, the immigrants in the north stepped forward. Of the two million individuals who enlisted on the Union side, a little less than a third had been born abroad. Of the one million who enlisted on the Confederate side, perhaps as few as nine per cent were foreign-born.

Germans made up the largest contingent at 200,000 volunteers. The Irish were next with 150,000, followed by the rest of the British Isles at 150,000. The rest of Europe contributed a further 75,000; and British North Americans (Canadians) brought up the rear with 50,000.

Not surprisingly, the number of immigrants slowed drastically when war broke out. The southern ports were closed by blockade, leaving just the north open for entry. Only 112,705 foreigners came in 1861, and 114,475 in 1862. But once the government began offering bounties,

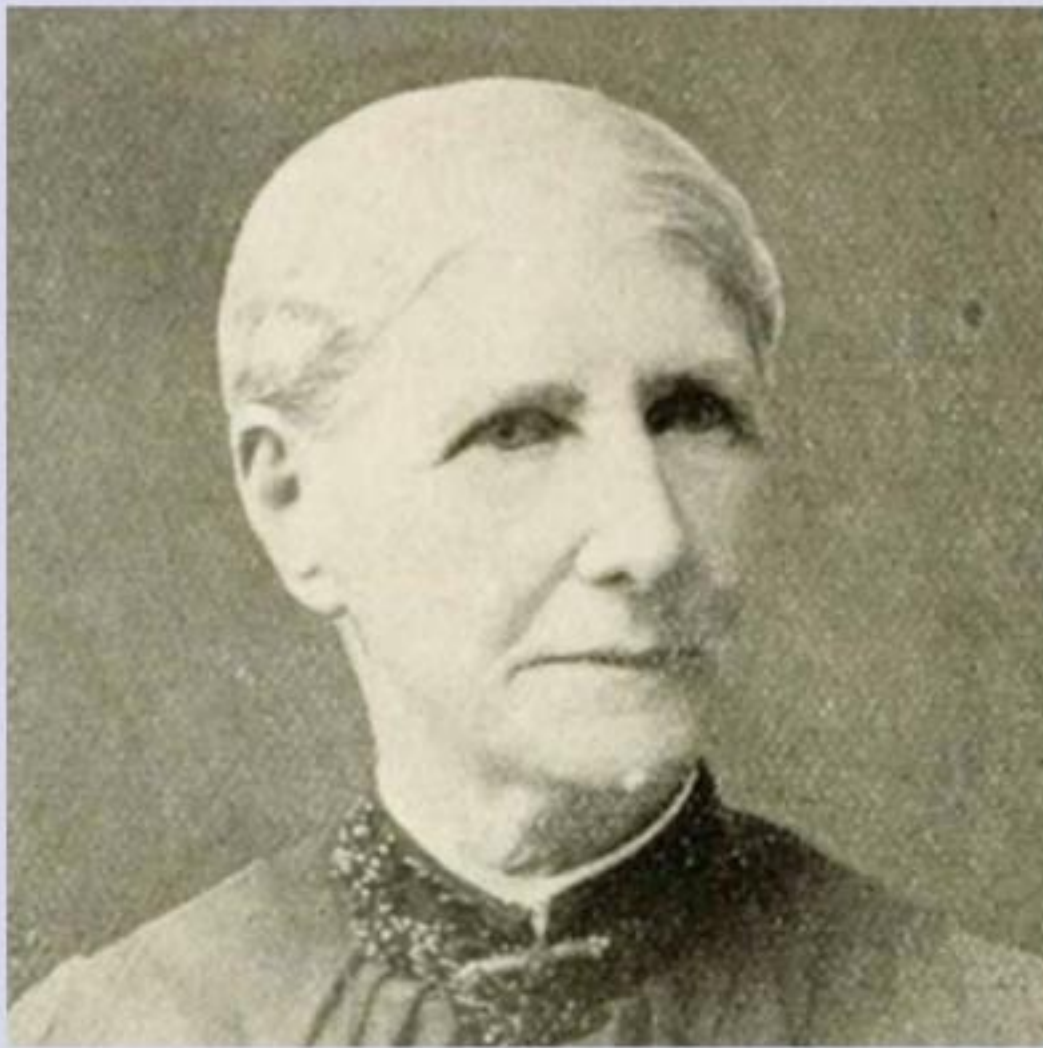
the tally jumped to 199,811 in 1863 and 221,525 in 1864.

In 1863, British Home Office officials did express some alarm that the war might cause a manpower shortage. But an analysis of passengers lists from Atlantic steamships put minds at rest. The numbers of young, unmarried men travelling to America were suspiciously high, but not enough to cause more than a blip in the labour market.

So who did volunteer? The six examples here reveal a surprising mix of class and backgrounds. People became embroiled in the war for all sorts of reasons. Some were true believers in the causes of the North or the South. Others were running away from broken lives. Many stayed on after the war, but even those who returned were forever changed by their experiences.

**Dr Amanda Foreman** is FRSA senior visiting scholar at Queen Mary, University of London and author of *A World on Fire: an Epic History of Two Nations Divided* (Penguin, 2011)





Irish-born Hill nursed Confederate soldiers through horrific battles

## The angel of mercy

Mary Sophia Hill

THERE IS NO record of a woman from the British Isles putting on a uniform to fight in the war. But they did serve as nurses in hospitals and field stations. A few women were properly trained – one, Elizabeth Blackwell, had a medical degree and trained at St Bart's – but most were like Mary Sophia Hill, who learned how to treat a bullet wound on a live patient.

Miss Hill was living in New Orleans when the war broke out, running a girls' seminary with her twin brother, Sam. She was Anglo-Irish, in her early 40s, and a thorough convert to the southern cause. When Sam joined the Sixth Louisiana Volunteers, Mary joined with him as the regiment's nurse. Beginning with the battle of Bull Run in July 1861, Mary stayed with the Sixth Louisiana for the next two years. She cleaned, bandaged, fed and comforted hundreds of wounded soldiers. "I heard and saw it all," Mary recorded in her memoir, "war in its grandeur and war in its meanness."

A furlough home to New Orleans in 1864 put an end to her activities. The city was under Federal occupation, and a paid informant denounced Mary as a Confederate spy. She was arrested and found guilty of espionage by a military tribunal. Eventually, the British Consul in New Orleans was able to have her sentence commuted to banishment into the south, but by then the war was nearly over. Mary never forgave the US government for her incarceration. In 1872 she sued the United States for false imprisonment in an international court and won \$1,560 in damages.

## The ne'er do well

James Horrocks

THE BOUNTIES OFFERED by the US government attracted all kinds of volunteers. For men seeking to escape their lives it was a like a dream come true.

In the summer of 1863, 19-year-old James Horrocks from Bolton in Lancashire was facing the wrath of his family and community for having fathered an illegitimate child. Worse, Horrocks refused to accept the child was his or to marry the mother. When the pressure became too much he simply ran away. The next time the Horrocks family heard from James he was in New Jersey, having enlisted in the Fifth New Jersey Artillery under the name of Andrew Ross.

"I shall get when mustered in \$200 from the state of New Jersey, \$50 from Hudson City (where I enlisted) and \$25 from the government," he wrote. "This, together with a month's pay in advance, will make \$288 cash. I shall be able to save more money as a soldier than as a clerk with \$400 a year (that is a pretty good salary in New York)." He reassured his shocked parents there was no need to worry: "I fully intend to desert if I don't get good treatment."

Horrocks did not desert – although at times he became quite fed up – and fought the entire nine-month campaign known as the Siege of Petersburg. When Richmond fell to General Grant on 3 April 1865, James was among the victorious Union troops that poured into the city. He spent the night on the floor in one of the bedrooms in the Confederate White House. "So I had the honour of sleeping in the house of [Confederate leader] Jeff Davis," he wrote to his brother, "if there is any honour in that."

Horrocks did not return to England and made a new life for himself in Missouri.



Horrocks joined the Union army after running away from home in England





Dawson began his career in the South's army as a sailor on a ship

### The idealist

Francis Warrington Dawson

IN LATE 1861, a 21-year-old Londoner named Austin Reeks said goodbye to his family, gave himself the new identity of Francis Dawson and snuck onto the Confederate states steamer *Nashville*, then at Southampton. As Austin, the youth had been carving out an unsuccessful career as a playwright. As Francis, he was still a dreamer, but now he was a knight errant on a mission to help the Confederacy to victory. "My idea simply was to go to the south, do my duty there as well as I might and return home to England," he later wrote.

The southern authorities were as amazed as the captain of CSS *Nashville*, who noted that Francis had "left family, friends, and every tie to espouse our cause" and "not to be put off by any difficulties thrown in his way, insisted upon serving under our flag, performing... the most menial duties of an ordinary seaman." Having started out in the navy, Francis soon joined the Confederate army where he served on General Longstreet's staff as his ordnance officer. He was wounded three and captured once.

Francis's devotion to the South never waned. He was present at Robert E Lee's final stand at Five Forks outside Richmond on 1 April 1865. "It was very difficult to rally the men," wrote Francis. "One fellow whom I halted as he was running to the rear, and whom I threatened to shoot if he did not stop, looked up in my face and, raising his carbine, fired it in the air and resumed his flight. It made me laugh, angry as I was."

Shortly after that incident, a Union bullet buried itself in Francis's shoulder and he was invalided out of the war, five weeks before its official end. Like James Horrocks, Francis remained in the US after the conflict. He became a distinguished journalist and editor in Charleston.

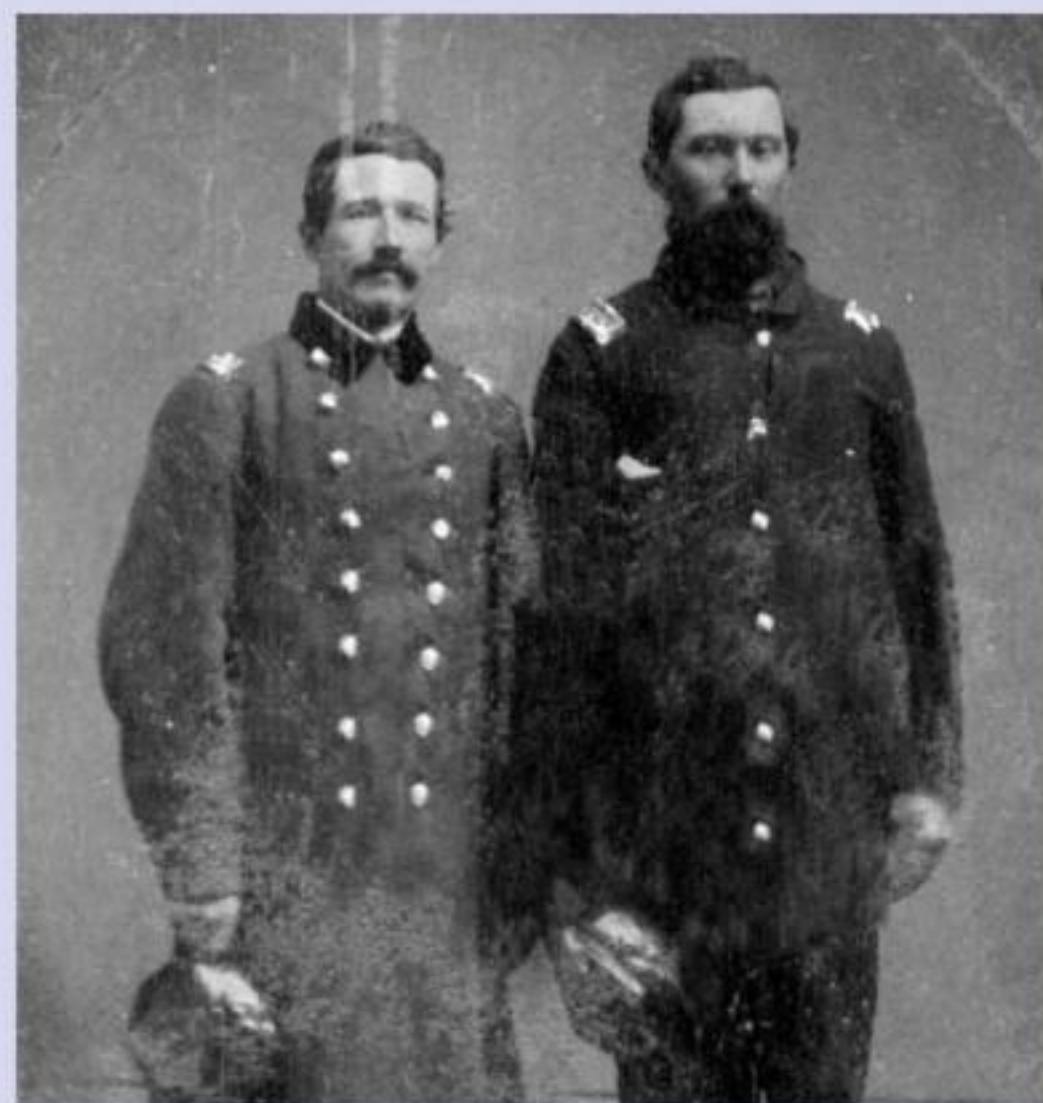
### The professional soldier

John Fitzroy De Courcy

JOHN FITZROY DE COURCY, also known as the 31st Baron Kinsale, lived for soldiering. After serving in the Crimean War (1853–56), where he led a Turkish regiment, De Courcy accepted a position to serve as the British magistrate on the island of San Juan in the disputed waters around the Washington Territory. He immediately regretted the decision. With the exception of a few months in 1859 when there was a tense stand-off between British and American troops over an incident known as the Pig War, there was absolutely nothing for De Courcy to do.

The 40-year-old soldier volunteered his services to the North as soon as the conflict began. Appointed Colonel of the 16th Ohio Volunteers, De Courcy led his troops through some of the most difficult terrain in the war. He was always pitted against impossible odds, whether it was an attempt to recapture the Cumberland Gap, where a single mountain pass links Tennessee with Kentucky and Virginia, or attacking Confederate forces protected by the steep bluffs of the Chickasaw Bayou in Mississippi.

De Courcy's war record never properly reflected his bold leadership nor the courage of his men. A dispute with General Ambrose Burnside led to his resignation in 1864. At De Courcy's farewell dinner, the 16th Ohio presented him with a commemorative sword, sash and belt. He replied in response: "If I did well, it was because they did better."



Professional soldier, De Courcy, right, led Union troops into bitter battles





Grenfell, seen second from the right, joined the South's secret service

### The spy

Colonel George St Leger Grenfell

COLONEL GRENFELL WAS a British soldier of fortune whose aristocratic family had long since given up expecting him to settle down. Grenfell was 53 years old when the civil war began. The swashbuckling nature of the southern irregulars, known as Partisan Rangers, appealed to Grenfell's sense of adventure. He had no hesitation in offering his services to the Confederacy, although his abhorrence of slavery would lead him into conflict with his superiors.

The first two years of the war were the happiest for Grenfell, when he spent some time riding alongside the popular hero General John Hunt Morgan, harassing Union troops in Kentucky. His move to the regular southern army under General Bragg was less successful and Grenfell eventually resigned his commission in 1864.

Instead of going home, Grenfell joined the Confederate secret service on a mission to lead an uprising in Chicago. Known as the 'north-western conspiracy', the plan involved Grenfell playing the part of an English tourist while he secretly prepared to lead an attack on the prisons holding Confederate prisoners of war. The plot was exposed, leading to the arrest of more than 100 insurgents.

Grenfell was sentenced to death, commuted to life imprisonment on the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Florida. After enduring three years of constant beatings, Grenfell and two friends tried to escape and were drowned in a storm.

### The reporter

Frank Vizetelly

FRANK VIZETELLY belonged to a famous family of Anglo-Italian printers who had been a fixture on Fleet Street, London since the 18th century. Frank was the younger brother of Henry, who helped found *The Illustrated London News*. By the time the American Civil War started Frank had covered numerous campaigns across Europe, including Giuseppe Garibaldi's conquest of Sicily.

A hard-drinking, hard-living journalist, Frank didn't just like to report on wars: whenever he could, he would take sides and join in. At the beginning of the civil war, Frank's sympathies were entirely pro-northern, but Washington's ill-conceived persecution of British journalists pushed Frank into Confederate arms. By late 1862, he had become an ardent southern partisan.

His reports and sketches for the *Illustrated News* are among the most vivid of the war precisely because he was always in the thick of the action, urging his friends on. Frank often travelled with *Times* reporter Francis Lawley and the two made a formidable duo. However, it was Frank who stayed at his post right to the bitter end. It is his sketches and reports that provide the only outside testimony to the last days of the Confederate government. He died in action in 1883, while reporting on the Anglo-Sudan War. **H**

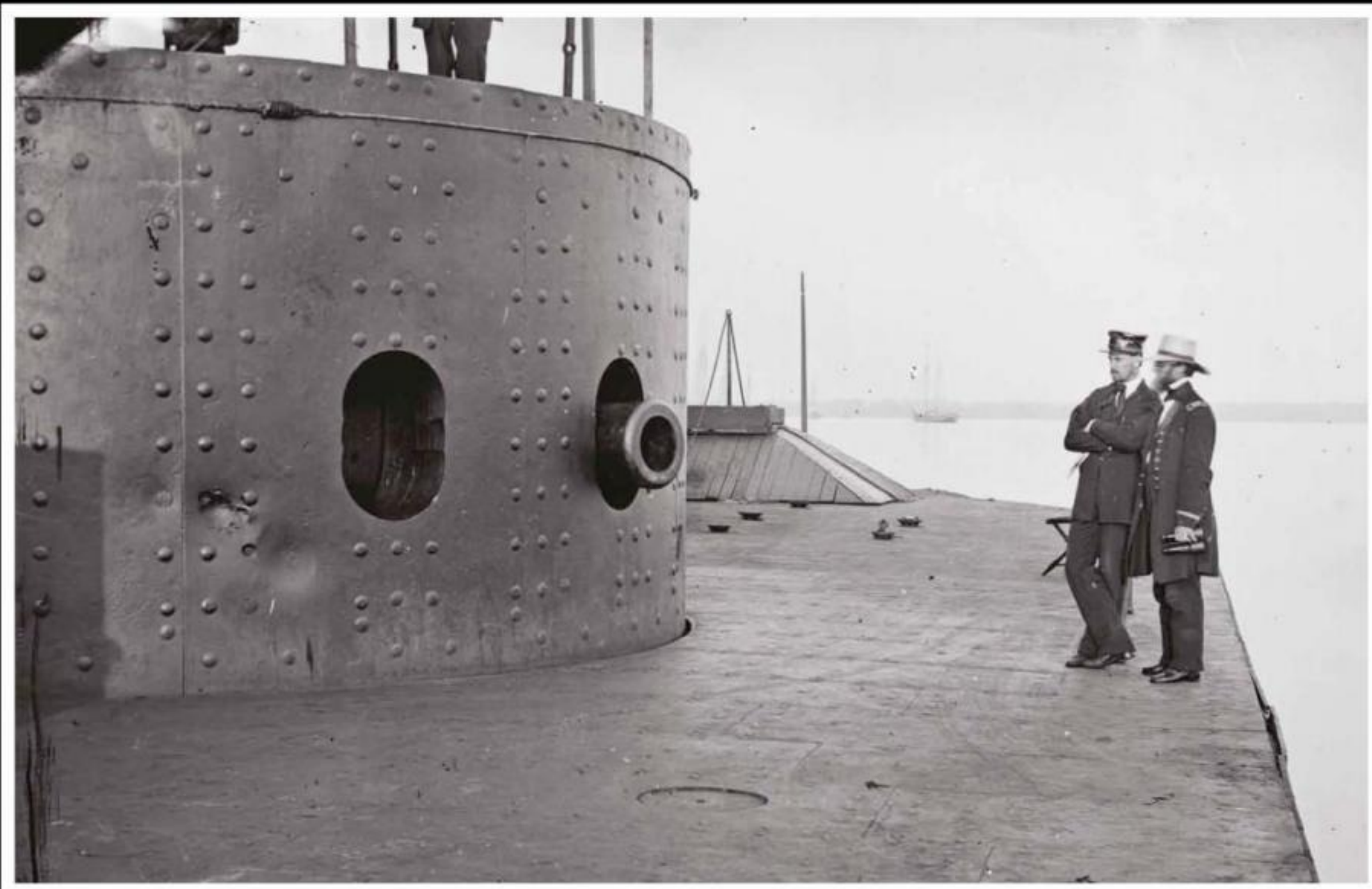


Getting involved in the action, Vizetelly's reports are graphic accounts



# The civil war in photos

That this most bloody of wars still seems vivid and familiar is partly thanks to the intrepid photographers who recorded key events and people – it was arguably the first major conflict to be extensively photographed. **Mike Musick** explores the significance of nine of the most enduring images



## ▲ Deck and turret of USS *Monitor* in the James River, Virginia, 9 July 1862

This image, by photographer James F Gibson, shows two US Navy officers examining the revolving turret of the *Monitor*, brainchild of Swedish-born engineer John Ericsson.

Clearly visible are indentations made by shots fired at her by CSS *Virginia* (rebuilt from the captured USS *Merrimack*) four months

earlier in the battle of Hampton Roads, which was the world's first fight between ironclads – steam-propelled warships protected with iron or steel plates. The dramatic arrival of the newly commissioned *Monitor* in that battle halted the seemingly inexorable destruction of the Union fleet – which would have ended the blockade of the South (for more on the battle, see p66). Wooden warships became obsolete almost overnight, prompting the writer Nathaniel

Hawthorne to lament that “All the pomp and splendor of naval warfare are gone by.”

The *Monitor* sank off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, in a storm on 30 December 1862, but by that point she had inspired an entire class of American warships that sailed for decades more. Her wreck was discovered in 1973 at a depth of around 70m (220ft); in March 2013, two crewmen found in the turret were interred in Arlington National Cemetery, 150 years after she went down.

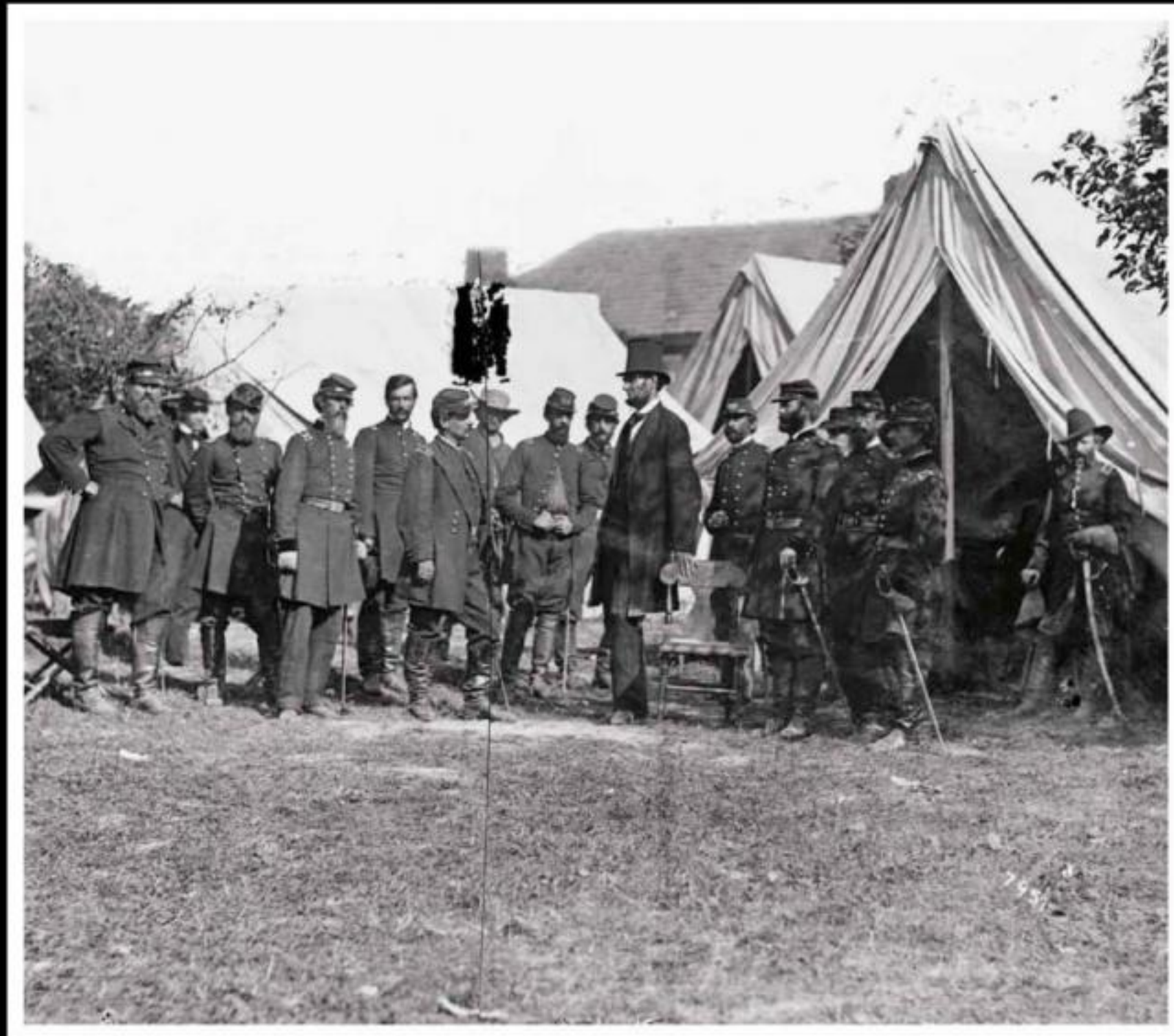


► **President Lincoln with General George B McClellan and a group of officers at Antietam, Maryland, 3 October 1862**

Adventurous photographer Alexander Gardner made his way to the battlefield at Antietam some weeks after the end of the clash. There he captured images of Lincoln conferring with McClellan. 'Little Mac' would later challenge 'Honest Abe' for the White House in the 1864 presidential election.

This picture shows the two leaders facing each other, flanked by generals and staff officers. George Armstrong Custer stands at far right; at that time he was a captain on McClellan's staff, but is better known for his part in the battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, when he and his command were slaughtered.

The site of this photograph is the Grove Farm, headquarters of Union General Fitz-John Porter. Gardner's Antietam images cemented the importance of this spot, which is now preserved and waymarked.



◀ **Confederate soldiers on a bridge, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 8 April 1863**

This image was taken by Captain Andrew J Russell, official photographer with the US Military Railroad Construction Corps, or an associate. It shows a group of Confederates under Brigadier General William Barksdale, gazing from the remains of a trestle over the Rappahannock river. A temporary truce has evidently been called; during such lulls opposing troops would trade goods (and insults). It is a rare picture of Confederate soldiers in the field.

By studying the writing on several prints, National Park Service historian Eric J Mink has recently identified one of them. The bearded officer standing on the right-hand bridge timber (circled), is Captain Andrew Robison Govan of B Company, 17th Mississippi Infantry. Exceedingly popular with the local ladies, Captain Govan had helped repulse the Federals at the battle of Fredericksburg on 11–15 December of the preceding year. He was cited by his superiors for gallantry, coolness and skill. A wound sustained on 20 September 1863 at the battle of Chickamauga, Georgia, required the amputation of his leg and resulted in his death.







## ◀ 'A Harvest of Death', Gettysburg, July 1863

Timothy H O'Sullivan's grim picture was given its equally morbid title by Alexander Gardner, who published it in his *Photographic Sketch Book of the War* in 1866. It preserves, in Gardner's words, "the blank horror and reality of war", here exemplified by the Union dead – victims of the conflict's most costly battle – whom Lincoln extolled as having given "the last full measure of devotion".

Historians, most notably William Frassanito, have studied O'Sullivan's work in detail. They have revealed how these same bodies, photographed from different angles, were used to represent both Federal and Confederate dead, as well as the far-removed spot where a general fell. This illustrates how the camera, though accurate, could – by the use of false captions – be made to lie.

## ▶ The dedication ceremony at the cemetery at Gettysburg, 19 November 1863

This enigmatic, broken glass plate, held in the National Archives and unidentified for over half a century, was ignored until photo-archivist Josephine Cobb brought it to light in 1952. Today it is recognised as a priceless treasure.

Cobb, following her intuition, researched its background, enlarged it, and studied it in detail. She was able to demonstrate conclusively that this image shows a bare-headed Lincoln (circled) surrounded by dignitaries and citizens at the dedication of the newly established cemetery for the Union dead at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, as it came to be known, received only a modicum of attention during the war. But by the start of the 20th century – and, to an even greater extent, in the years since – it came to be cherished by millions of Americans as the greatest utterance of their greatest president, a transcendent expression of the nation's aspirations.







▲ **George N Barnard's photographic equipment south-east of Atlanta, Georgia, 1864**

With their arms stacked nearby, a group of General William T Sherman's tough, rangy veterans sits at leisure atop Confederate trenches outside the town called the 'Gate

City of the South'. At the right of the scene is the portable darkroom tent, equipment and assistant of photographer George Barnard.

The overwhelming majority of photographs taken during the war were individual portraits, most posed in studios safely behind the lines. Posterity owes a great debt to Barnard and those other intrepid artists who abandoned the security

of home, risking financial loss – and, sometimes, their lives – to imprint on fragile glass plates the look and feel of history as it unfolded in the field. The technology of the time essentially prevented the capture of battle pictures, but these men stretched the limits of their craft beyond what had previously been deemed possible, bringing the reality of the war to the country's eyes.



◀ **An unidentified African-American soldier in Union uniform with his wife and two daughters, c1863–65**

In 1862, the Union army began to enlist black soldiers into its ranks. Despite a tradition of such service dating back to the American Revolution, by the middle of the 19th century, regulations forbade the recruitment of black men, so this new policy seemed nothing short of revolutionary. In total, some 200,000 African-Americans mustered under the Stars and Stripes during the war; however, portraits of black servicemen and their families are seldom encountered.

This photograph was found in Cecil County, Maryland, and probably shows a member of one of seven regiments of United States Colored Troops raised in that state, along with his family. In Maryland, a border state that had not seceded, slavery ended in 1864. It wasn't until 13 March 1865 that the Confederacy allowed black men to sign up as soldiers – too late to make a difference.





▲ **Auction & Negro Sales on Whitehall Street (now Peachtree Street), Atlanta, Georgia, late 1864**

George Barnard's photograph shows a solitary Union corporal, rifle-musket at his side, stationed in front of what had formerly

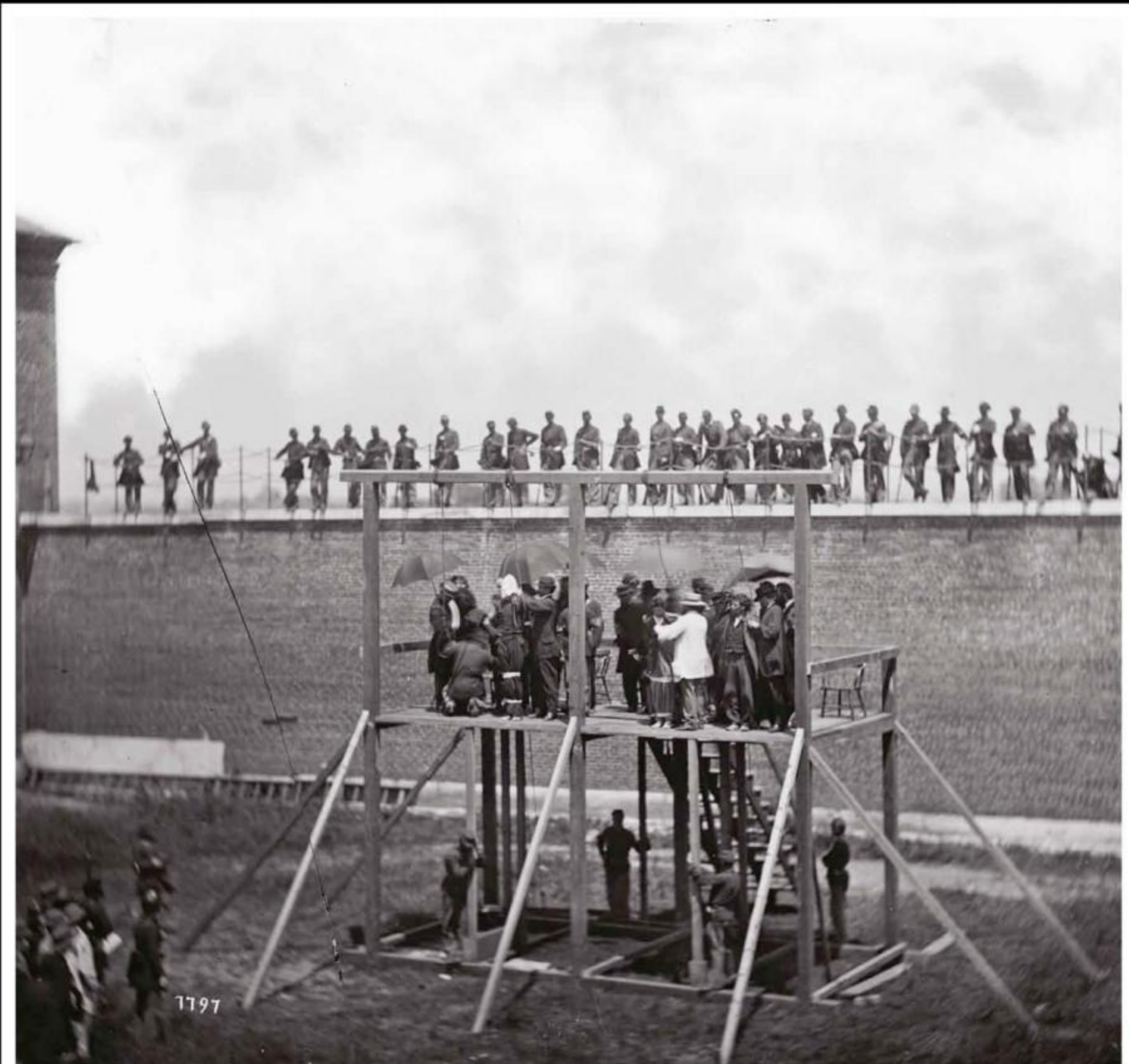
been an establishment in which humans were sold. At this time, Atlanta was an important railroad hub in north Georgia, but had not yet been made the state capital.

Not long before this photograph was taken, a Georgia newspaper had announced that "We regard every man in our midst an enemy to the institutions of the South, who

does not boldly declare that he believes African slavery to be a social, moral, and political blessing."

By the time this image was made, slavery was tottering toward extinction. The city had fallen to Sherman on 2 September, and on 11 November he ordered its destruction, sparing only its churches and hospitals.





▲ **Adjusting the ropes for the hanging of the conspirators in Lincoln's assassination, Washington, DC, 7 July 1865**

Though John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's assassin, was shot dead before he could be arrested, others involved in the plot were tried, convicted and executed. Alexander Gardner was granted the exclusive opportunity to photograph the hangings, which he did in a series of step-by-step images. This picture shows, from right to left, George Atzerodt, David E Herold and Lewis Powell (alias Payne) being fitted with nooses. At the far left of the scaffold sits Mary E Surratt, who kept the boarding house where the conspirators met, and whose son was a Confederate Secret Service agent. Her hanging alongside the conspirators on 7 July made her the first woman executed by the Federal government. Material held at the Surratt Society in Clinton (formerly Surrattsville), Maryland, has been of enormous benefit to many scholars researching the assassination.

**Mike Musick** is the retired Subject Area Expert for the US Civil War at the National Archives in Washington, DC



Women played their part in the civil war, as shown in this 1861 photograph of camp life in the 31st Pennsylvania Regiment of the Union army





# WOMEN & THE CIVIL WAR

Nurses, spies, gravediggers and even, masquerading as men, soldiers, women's roles during the civil war were far more varied than the fictional Scarlett O'Hara might suggest, says **Catherine Clinton**

**W**HEN AMERICANS CELEBRATED the centenary of the civil war in the 1960s, the image of Scarlett O'Hara, played by Vivien Leigh, standing before a Technicolor-drenched panorama from the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939) served as a symbol for women's experiences on the home front during the conflict.

Half a century later, O'Hara retains her crown as an iconic image of the lost cause, but modern novelists have also given us civil war survivors such as Sethe (from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes (from Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*) and a new take on the world of *Little Women* in Geraldine Brooks's Pulitzer-prize winning *March*. Equally compelling, historians continue to excavate non-fictional heroines, which contributes to a more authentic appreciation of the war's indelible impact on women's lives.

Imagine a young white girl trapped in the siege of Atlanta, a child such as Carrie Berry, whose account reveals war weariness, as she writes on 3 August 1864: 'Wednesday. This was my birthday. I was 10 years old, But I did not have a cake, times were too hard so I celebrated with ironing. I hope by my next birthday we will have peace in our land so that I can have a nice dinner.'

The misery of this little girl might be measured against that of Elizabeth Thorn, the wife of the Evergreen Cemetery caretaker, whose husband was off at war during the Confederate

invasion of their family home in the small Pennsylvania town of Gettysburg. Following the epic battle in July 1863, when the dead and wounded left behind outnumbered the living 11 to one, Thorn struggled to dig graves for more than 100 of the 3,500 Union soldiers requiring burial. She did this when in the last stages of a difficult pregnancy during the long, hot summer of 1863. Such was the toll of war imposed at a place where Lincoln would later give his famous address, delivered on 19 November to commemorate a national cemetery. On the Confederate side, Mrs Willoughby Newton reportedly read a funeral service when pickets

## While in the last stages of pregnancy, Elizabeth Thorn dug graves at Gettysburg

refused to allow a minister through for the burial of William Latané. This was immortalised in William Washington's popular painting, *The Burial of Latané*, which became one of the most popular images on display in southern white homes after the war.

### Day-to-day struggle

Fears for death and dying were omnipresent, but most women, especially in the Confederate states, struggled to survive amidst shortages, stints as refugees and agonising delays to hear news from the front. African-American women, the overwhelming majority enslaved and living within the south, were exposed to even greater challenges. Some, like Susie King Taylor of Savannah, Georgia, took advantage of wartime dislocations to liberate herself. The intrepid young girl left behind her family – and bondage – when she ➤



*The Burial of Latané* shows Mrs Willoughby Newton reading a funeral service for a fallen Confederate soldier

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X2





A nurse treats two wounded soldiers. Many women were inspired by the example of Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimean War

➤ sought Yankee protection in the Union-occupied Sea Islands (from which the planters had fled), running off as a teenager in April 1862. Literate and articulate, she was put in charge of teaching other black refugees in temporary outdoor schoolrooms. She became a nurse to many of the wounded soldiers and a champion of black equality.

She was joined in the Union hospital tents by volunteer Clara Barton, who like many other intrepid Yankees left conventional domestic roles behind for service. Dorothea Dix was superintendent of army nurses for the Federal forces. Katharine Wormeley was one of the first women to serve on a hospital ship. Sally Tompkins established a hospital in a Richmond home and was awarded the rank of captain by Confederate leader Jefferson Davis.

### Military roles

Several women contributed to their patriotic cause by serving as spies. Rose Greenhow was credited with smuggling intelligence to the Confederacy from her home in Washington, information which contributed to success at the first battle of Bull Run in 1861. Since she was moved from house arrest to a cell at the Old Capitol Prison, where she was confined with her eight-year-old daughter, clearly her role as a spy was acknowledged by both sides. Richmond resident Elizabeth Van Lew was at the centre of a network of informants reporting to the Yankee command. She wandered the streets freely gathering information and pretending she was feeble minded, becoming known as Crazy Bet.

The only women more intrepid during this period were those who



Escaped slave Susie King Taylor tended black soldiers



Sarah Rosetta Wakeman adopted a male persona, Lyons Wakeman, and served as a soldier

served as soldiers, disguising themselves as men to enlist for service and even combat, with a variety of motives and outcomes. Union advocate Sarah Rosetta Wakeman enlisted as a man, and died in the Red River Campaign in June 1864. Canadian-born Sarah Emma

main struggling to preserve families, to promote virtue and patriotism, and to preserve the glory of their causes – won or lost. A large contingent of northern women moved into activist and reform circles during the war. They ranged from those who organised the Women's Central Association of Relief, including pioneering physician Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, to those who volunteered to travel south to serve as teachers in the Sea Islands where Susie King Taylor first found her freedom. All were sidelined once the civil war concluded.

Several tried to maintain wartime gains, to continue to serve in previously all-male preserves such as the US Treasury. The US economy boomed during wartime, with the influx of immigrants into the country uninterrupted by either the call to arms or four embattled years. With the cessation of war, women stood ready to reap the peace benefit.

It was with some disappointment then that many women reformers, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton

## Union spy Elizabeth Van Lew pretended to be feeble-minded to gather secrets

Edmonds survived her wartime experience fighting as Union Private Franklin Thompson. She published her autobiography, embellished with images of herself as a woman alongside a portrait of herself disguised as a soldier. She wasn't the only cross-dressing soldier who published a memoir of her exploits.

Beyond these few 'impermissible patriots' the ordinary and everyday experiences of wartime women demonstrated that they were in the



and Susan B Anthony, were lectured by black activists that in war's aftermath it was 'the negro's hour', and women would have to postpone their claiming of rights and the assertion of their liberty. With war's end most men, especially returning soldiers, demanded a return to the status quo and expected women's push for equality to ebb.

But whatever women's post-war disappointments, we can now identify many more examples of varied experiences within the civil war era itself – from administrators to volunteers, from authors to advocates, from divorcing wives to grieving widows, from soldiers to spies, from plantation mistresses forced to undertake their own manual labours to black southern women who braved reprisals to assist Union soldiers. An avalanche of new investigations about women's wartime experiences deepens our understanding of lived experiences.

### Statues to the fallen

Despite this, the stepdaughters of Scarlett O'Hara have had the lion's share of popular cultural attention. The 'remembrance of things imagined' has played in to this image, because white southern women became preoccupied with commemoration and statuary in post-war America, overwhelming the landscape with tributes to dead heroes. Nevertheless, for all these acts of remembrance, revisionist scholars have suggested Confederate women's loss of faith may have contributed to the defeat of secessionists. Whatever the truth, the battle of interpretations will continue with each rising generation of civil war scholars.

In any case, most American women were simply relieved the war had ended, even if for white southerners this meant the collapse of government and the loss of a way of life. A return to some semblance of normality was embraced by the majority. And for a first generation of emancipated, formerly enslaved women, there was the promise of a new birth of freedom, even if it was a dream deferred – for white women as well as for African-Americans. **H**

**Catherine Clinton** is professor of US history at Queen's University Belfast and the author of *Mrs Lincoln: A Life* (HarperCollins, 2009)

## Five women of the American Civil War



### QUEEN OF THE CONFEDERATE COURT

**MARY BOYKIN CHESNUT** was part of the Confederate court in Richmond, scribbling the breaking news of battles and back-biting among Jefferson Davis's intimate circle. Her memoir, first published nearly 19 years after her death, is the most widely cited civil war journal because of its engrossing prose and vivid evocation of the southern white psyche. Chesnut also provided tart critiques of her fellow slaveholders. As for her own foibles: she might have recognised them, but she really couldn't comment.



### FIRST LADY OF THE UNION

**MARY LINCOLN**, the southern-born bride of Abraham Lincoln, found herself in a precarious position when her husband blockaded the Confederacy in April 1861. Isolation in the White House, especially after her son Willie's death in 1862, destabilised the First Lady. She devoted herself to her husband's health and hospital charity, but the strain of war took its toll. The couple were happy when the Confederacy finally surrendered and their son Robert arrived home. Mary's happiness was cut short by her husband's assassination on 14 April 1865.



### HEROINE BEHIND ENEMY LINES

**HARRIET TUBMAN** was an ex-slave who escaped north before the war. She became a heroic leader in the Underground Railroad, a network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape. She headed back south behind enemy lines once Lincoln declared war in April 1861. In the summer of 1863, Tubman engineered a raid up the Combahee River, smuggling more than 700 runaway slaves to safety and freedom. Her battle for a military pension would last for decades, but finally in 1899 Tubman's service and accomplishments gained recognition.



### ANGEL OF THE BATTLEFIELD

**CLARA BARTON** was a Massachusetts-born educator who collected medicine and food to send to Union soldiers. She campaigned for direct access, and by the second summer of the war she took supplies directly to the front, and became known as the 'Angel of the Battlefield'. After the war, she devoted her energies to locating Union soldiers who had not returned to their families. Through her efforts more than 20,000 soldiers were cleared from the missing list. She went on to found the American Red Cross.



### MASQUERADED AS A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

**LORETA JANETA VELASQUEZ** defied the conventional path carved out for her. Ignoring the wishes of her husband, Velasquez decided to disguise herself as a man to serve in the Confederate army. At the battle of Shiloh, she was wounded and the army doctor treating her discovered she was a woman. Next, she headed to Richmond to offer her services as a spy. Her memoir, *The Woman in Battle* (1876) detailed her struggles on and off the battlefield.



# The battle of GETTYSBURG

In 1863, Robert E Lee led the Army of Northern Virginia in an invasion of the north. It was, says **Brian Holden Reid**, the last chance for Confederate victory. But the Union Army of the Potomac was waiting in the town of Gettysburg. It would take over 7,000 fatalities to decide the pivotal battle of the war...





**O**N THE AFTERNOON of Friday, 3 July 1863, Robert E Lee, commander of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, rode forward on news that his troops had been repulsed just south of Gettysburg, a Pennsylvania college town just 80 miles away from the nation's capital, Washington, DC.

His behaviour was termed by eyewitnesses as 'sublime', as he reassured his frightened men: "All this will come right in the end: we'll talk it over afterwards; but in the meantime all good men must rally". He was even overheard to say to a subordinate, "all this has been my fault – it is I that have lost this fight, and you must help me out of it in the best way you can". A few weeks earlier, Lee's ambitious invasion of the north had started so well.

After victory at the battle of Chancellorsville (1–5 May 1863), Lee had decided that, rather than send reinforcements to Confederate

forces at the beleaguered Mississippi city of Vicksburg, he would move north on 3 June, officially beginning the Gettysburg campaign. He would cross the Potomac river that traced the border between the Union and the Confederacy. By invading, he would bring pressure to bear on the Federal government and turn the tide of war decisively in the Confederacy's favour.

## **"It is I that have lost this fight, and you must help me out of it" – Robert E Lee**

### **Crossing the Potomac**

The Confederate force's vanguard, Richard S Ewell's Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, crossed the Potomac river on 15 June 1863. They pushed through Maryland, entered Pennsylvania and even threatened the state capital,

Harrisburg. The pace of Lee's advance caused panic, yet as Confederate troops fanned out to subsist off the countryside, the danger increased that they might collide with Federal troops and bring on a battle Lee was not best prepared for.

Their opposition, the Union Army of the Potomac, was commanded by Joseph Hooker, whose confidence had not yet recovered from his previous humiliation at the battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia, where he was defeated by Lee's far smaller force. He initially suggested going south, as Lee advanced north, in order to take the city of Richmond, which served as the Confederate capital. President Lincoln rejoined sharply that his object was Lee's army.

Hooker advanced north, shielding Washington, DC. His relations with the general-in-chief Henry W Halleck had deteriorated badly and on 27 June he asked to be relieved. By 3am the following day, George G Meade ➤



### **Human cost**

Gettysburg took the lives of 3,155 Union soldiers and 3,903 Confederate soldiers



➤ was appointed in his place, protesting his inadequacy. It was not the best time to change commanders.

## Overtaken by events

Meade proved a skilled tactician, but he had to overcome the defensive-mindedness that had, by now, soaked into his army. On his first day in command he received an accurate estimate of the size of Lee's army – 80,000 men. Meade planned to fend off Lee's manoeuvres and withdraw to an advantageous defensive position, but as the Union army advanced north, events overtook this scheme. Some of Lee's previous triumphs had been based on the skillful gathering and utilisation of intelligence. Far north in enemy country, however, he could not rely on the information brought to him. On 25 June he made his position even more challenging by despatching General JEB Stuart's best three brigades on a cavalry raid around the Union army. Stuart soon found himself cut off from reporting back and he could not return the way he had come because he had seized 125 wagons and had a long vulnerable 'tail'. He was out of contact for a week, a terrible handicap as Lee groped blindly northwards.

By 28 June, Lee had only the haziest idea as to the location of the Army of the Potomac. That evening he received some hard intelligence when one of General Longstreet's (Lee's subordinate, whom he referred to as his "old war horse") spies, Henry T Harrison, rode into camp. Harrison reported that Union troops lay between South Mountain and Frederick, Maryland.

Lee assumed that they remained south of the Potomac. He intended to catch individual Union corps unawares and destroy them piecemeal. In the past, Lee had made his own luck and exploited events, but to impose his will on the enemy demanded accurate information. He did not have that in the days before Gettysburg.

Meade's army, meanwhile, had entered Pennsylvania. Meade had retained an innovation of Hooker's by placing almost half his army, the First, Third and Eleventh Corps, under the command of his old friend, John F Reynolds. On 30 June, two brigades of Union cavalry entered Gettysburg. Lee's army advanced eastwards through the Cashtown Gap, "to see what General Meade is

**Lee suggested to Ewell that he take the artillery-heavy high ground "if practicable." Ewell decided it was not**

after". The orders of the respective commanders made a collision between their armies very likely.

## The armies clash

Fighting began on 1 July, when two brigades of Confederate General Henry Heth's division clashed with Union cavalry. This sucked larger units into the fray.

Two Union corps, the First and the Eleventh, then were defeated by the larger two Confederate corps, the Second and the Third. Lee had hesitated to bring on a big battle, but at 2.30pm he received word that



Union General Reynolds was killed on 1 July when the armies first clashed at Gettysburg

Stuart's return was imminent. An assault on the Union left and centre broke through. Union troops fled back through Gettysburg and streamed up on the high ground south of the town, leaving behind 8,800 casualties and General Reynolds's corpse on the field. Meade sent forward Major General Winfield Scott Hancock to take command.

Lee had enjoyed initial success but he knew little of the ground or forces in front of him. Over the next two days, each small win would lure him into gambling for higher stakes and he rapidly lost his freedom of action.

Lee suggested to General Ewell that he take the artillery-heavy high ground "if practicable". Ewell, his men exhausted, decided that it was not – a decision that some believe changed the eventual outcome of the battle. Lee changed his mind twice as to whether Ewell should stay put or move behind the Union position, finally deciding in favour of the latter. This ensured that a great battle would be fought over this ground.

## Battlefield terrain

The field of Gettysburg was much more open than the scene of some of Lee's earlier triumphs, with undulating fields and meadows, and some rugged hills dissected by ravines cut by small streams. Seminary Ridge, occupied by Lee's troops, was wooded.

The Union position has been likened to a 'fishhook', anchored in a long twist from Culp's Hill along Cemetery Hill, before swinging south along the high Cemetery Ridge that stretches for a mile and a half, until finally supported by two prominent conical hills, Little Round Top and Big Round Top.

The soldiers of both sides that took up position on this ground were, by this date, proud, experienced, resilient and hard-bitten. Union troops had



**After the battle**  
Cemetery Ridge, a strategic location held by Union forces during Gettysburg, shows signs of the bitter fighting that took place there



## Key events in the battle of Gettysburg

The map shows Union and Confederate positions before the final encounter. The key events of the battle were:

### 1 July, 7.30am–5pm

The First and Eleventh Union Corps are defeated north and west of Gettysburg. They retreat to high ground to the south

### 2 July, 12–1pm

Daniel E Sickles, commanding Union Third Corps, decides, without telling Meade, to advance beyond Cemetery Ridge to occupy the Peach Orchard. This creates a weak spot in Meade's position

### 2 July, 3–4 pm

Union forces occupy Little Round Top. Longstreet's troops make progress at Sickles' expense but fail to make a breakthrough. He therefore cannot move artillery up on to Cemetery Ridge

### 3 July, 8–11am

Union troops at Culp's Hill drive Confederates from the breastworks they had captured the day before

### 3 July, 1.07pm

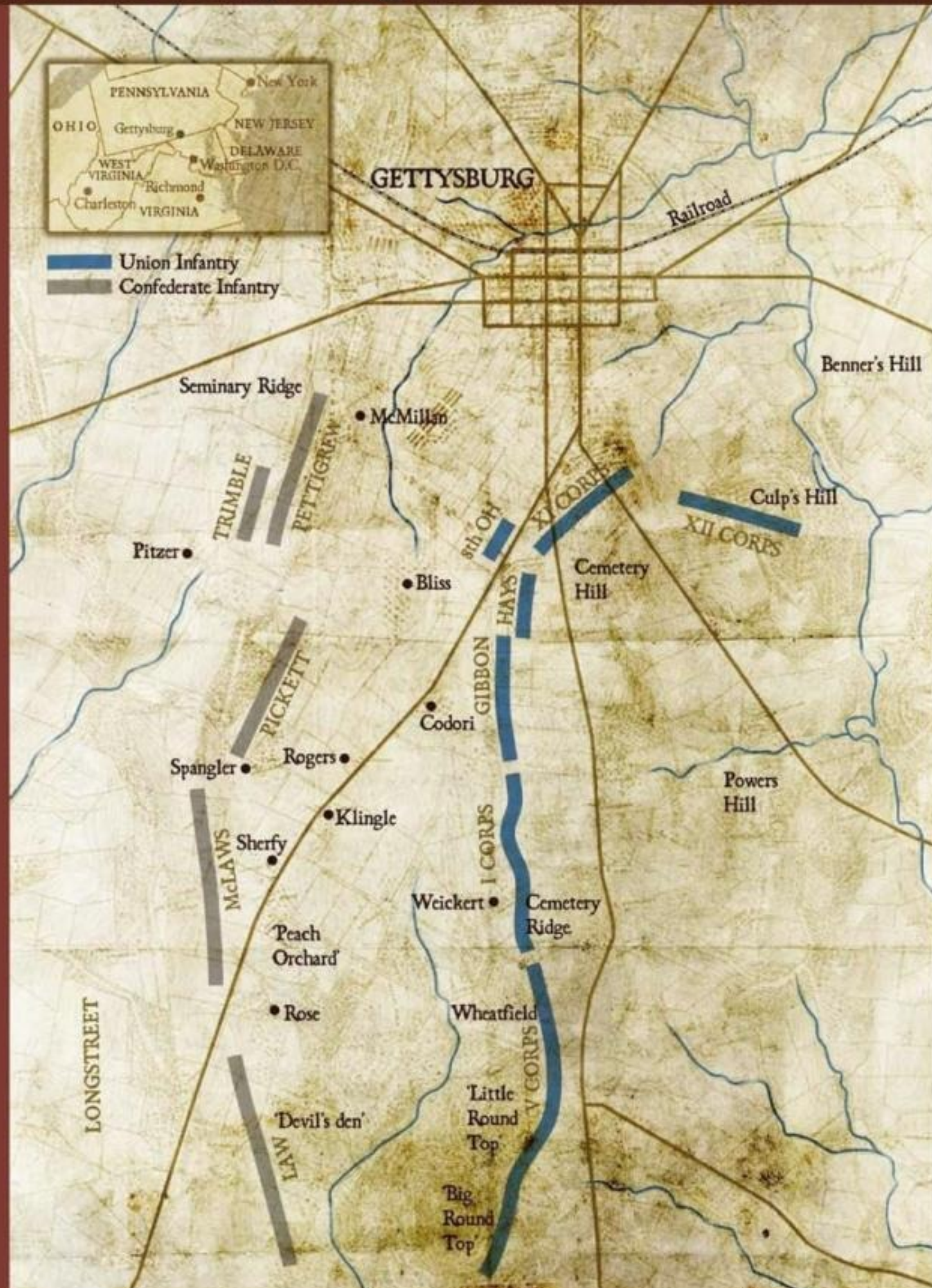
162 Confederate guns open a bombardment on Cemetery Ridge

### 3 July, 2.30–4 pm

Pickett's charge, involving troops from three other divisions, is thrown forward towards a central point on Cemetery Ridge but is repulsed. Stuart's cavalry also fails to break into the Union rear

### 4 July, 4pm

Lee's retreat begins. He escapes unscathed by 5 July. Meade follows 24 hours later, his caution permitting Lee to re-cross the Potomac river on 15 July



been unmoved by their defeat at Chancellorsville. They did not deserve the ridicule too easily doled out by over-confident Confederates.

General Meade did not arrive to take personal command of his Union troops until about 2am on 2 July. At daybreak, he recognised the strength of his position and hurried up the Second, Third and Fifth Corps to tighten his grip on it. He planned to place the Second Corps on Cemetery Ridge with the Third to its left anchored on Little Round Top.

Third Corps, commanded by the raffish Daniel E Sickles, arrived on

the position at about 10am. He noticed that the ground beyond, covered by a peach orchard, was higher than Cemetery Ridge, and queried Meade's orders, even riding to headquarters at the Leister House to question them personally. Meade, had a benign appearance but a savage temper. For once he kept it, and observed that Sickles could interpret his orders so long as they remained within the general's framework. Thus encouraged, Sickles ordered his corps to advance towards the peach orchard without telling Meade, thus weakening the Union position.

In the early hours of the morning Lee's reconnaissance party reported that the Union left flank was exposed. Shortly afterwards, Longstreet argued the desirability of moving around Meade's position; he would later present this as a cogent defensive-offensive plan that would tempt Meade to attack Lee. But without the necessary intelligence from Stuart where would the army move to? Longstreet did not say. Lee had not rejected his suggestions, but with clear intelligence available, Lee decided to attack the Union left. Longstreet, as the most





➤ experienced corps commander, was chosen to command what Lee hoped would be a decisive stroke.

Lee is often criticized for what many see as a 'vague' plan. His army were insufficiently concentrated for a great battle. When Lee returned from a visit to Ewell at about 11.30am, he was displeased that Longstreet had made few preparations for the assault. But Longstreet pleaded that he should wait for Law's brigade, which arrived about 30 minutes later. Shortly afterwards, Stuart arrived to face brusque treatment from Lee; he was given instructions to take his troopers to the northeast of Ewell's corps.

## Taking the high ground

During the mid-afternoon, elements of the Union Fifth Corps occupied Little Round Top. The concave shape of Meade's position enabled the Federals to move and act more swiftly than the Confederates. The concentrated Union position covered about two miles, while the Confederate's stretched for six. Yet even allowing for this disadvantage, Longstreet's assault, finally launched

**Ewell's attack on the Union army at Culp's Hill on 3 July, sketched by artist Edwin Forbes on the battlefield**

at 4pm, was not well directed. Hood's division became distracted along Devil's Den and into Rose Woods, and was absorbed by the fight for Little Round Top.

Union troops rushed in to hold the line. In consolidating their ground facing south, a colour-bearer rode up. "Colonel, I'll be damned if I don't think we are faced the wrong way. The Rebs are... in the woods behind us, on the right". The Colonel discovered he was correct, as southern Rebels and northern Yankees were all mixed up, and it was difficult to find the 'front line'.

Major General Lafayette McLaws' division had more success, driving the Union's Third Corps back up Cemetery Ridge. A Third Corps officer looking down Cemetery Ridge that evening recounted: "The smoke of their rifles encircled them, the

**"I'll be damned if I don't think we are faced the wrong way. The Rebs are... in the woods behind us"**

flashes lighted up the field upon which the shadows... were advancing and the scene resembled one of those battles which are seen in pictures where the lines of battle are formed with mathematical exactness".

Despite this advance, nothing decisive was achieved. Longstreet failed to get his artillery up onto Little Round Top or Cemetery Ridge, which would have made General Meade's position untenable.

General Ewell's diversionary attacks on the Union right had made little impact on Longstreet's assault and the pattern would again be repeated on 3 July at Culp's Hill. Lee decided to focus on the Union centre, which he calculated had been weakened in numbers so as to better prop up the flanks.

## Pickett's charge

A tense meeting took place on the morning of 3 July. Lee, Longstreet and AP Hill, commander of Third Corps, were in attendance but Ewell and Stuart were not. Longstreet urged Lee to manoeuvre around Ewell's right. Lee overruled him and stuck to his plan. He was running out of options.

The 5,000 Virginians of General George Pickett's division were to be the centrepiece of the attack, however the bulk of the 13,000 troops came from three divisions of Hill's corps. (Interestingly, few contemporaries – unless directly engaged – actually record witnessing 'Pickett's charge'. Its fame is a triumph of the Virginian writing of Confederate history).

Much of the meeting was taken up resolving differences between Longstreet and Hill over the mode of attack. Lee hoped to aid the breakthrough by ordering Stuart to advance down the Bonaughton Road and cause mayhem in the Union rear. Greater unanimity prevailed at a Union council of war convened by Meade before midnight. His commanders agreed they should remain on the defensive for another day. Meade correctly predicted the attack would come from the centre.

Just after 1pm, a Confederate bombardment of 162 guns opened up, making remarkably little contribution to the drama of the afternoon. Union guns eventually went silent to conserve ammunition. At this point the Confederate infantry emerged through the woods and began its march up towards the guns on Cemetery Hill.

This was one of the most dramatic moments of the entire war. The cry went up along the Union line: "There they are... There comes the infantry!" For all their dress irregularities, these long lines of Confederate infantry were perfectly aligned as if on parade, with colours unfurled, advancing silently. As they moved into the shallow area between



**The men they left behind**  
Confederate dead gathered for burial at the edge of Rose Woods, photographed a couple of days after the battle

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X2, CORBIS





**Follow me** Armistead raising his hat to guide his troops during the doomed Confederate charge on 3 July

Seminary and Cemetery Ridges, the Union artillery opened fire, tearing great holes in their ranks.

A considerable gap opened in the middle of the Confederates' formation between Pickett's troops and Hill's men on their left. Pickett's division had to swerve to the left towards its objective: a small copse of trees in the middle of Hancock's Second Corps line. Union fire had a truly deadly effect; Meade's troops using solid shot at a distance and canister when close up (best at point-blank range). This was supplemented by rifled-musket volleys.

As Union regiments began to advance to move around the Confederates' exposed flanks, a participant listened above the din of battle. He heard a "strange and terrible" sound, one "that came from thousands of human throats, yet was not a commingling of shouts and yells but rather like a vast mournful roar".

The commander of the closest Confederate brigade, Lewis Armistead, placed his hat aloft on his sword tip to guide those behind. The line, however, weakened as they closed on the Union troops. Armistead fell mortally wounded among 6,000 Confederate casualties. The Union Second Corps commander, Hancock, had been friends with Armistead before the war, and in his dying breath the Confederate entrusted some mementos, his watch and spurs, to his Union adversary. The survivors of the Confederate assault streamed back to be met by their commander.

But there was no good news to be found. Three miles away Stuart's weary troopers failed to break a resolute Union cavalry defence, mounted among others by a certain George A. Custer.

### Disaster for the South

Some 28,000 casualties had been sustained by the Confederates and 23,000 by the Union (3,903 Confederate dead, 3,155 Union dead). But, despite the carnage, the significance of the South's defeat was not appreciated immediately by the

**"A strange and terrible sound came from thousands of human throats... like a vast mournful roar"**

surviving participants. Many of Lee's soldiers felt they had not "given a fair showing" during these three days and hoped that Lee would lead them north again.

Yet Gettysburg was a disaster for the Confederacy. Lee's was a defeat explained by a series of errors – in intelligence, command and tactics – that prevented him from landing one powerful blow. He and his men were over-confident and excessively contemptuous of their enemy.

For his part, Meade committed no serious errors, and mounted a cohesive defence with adequate reserves. But, despite his victory, long-term glory was not to be his. His over-cautious pursuit of Lee, from

4–6 July, which permitted Lee to escape despite being trapped by floodwaters, revealed to President Lincoln that Meade was not the man to galvanise the Union war effort. Nevertheless, Meade had destroyed the offensive capacity of Lee's army, which never returned to northern soil again.

### The Gettysburg address

The Union victory at Gettysburg – three days of fighting in which the Confederates consistently attacked and the Federals defended – brought massive relief in Washington. News arrived on 4 July and of the fall of Vicksburg on the Mississippi river on 7 July – an equally massive boost to the Union cause. The north gained the initiative both in military and moral terms and the Confederate cause lost appeal in the wider world, especially in London, where slavery had already been abolished.

On 19 November, President Lincoln visited Gettysburg. In his celebrated address – a mere 272 words – he declared a "new birth of freedom", and that a "government of the people, by the people, for the people" had been safeguarded.

The North gained a great advantage in the war of values, ideas and propaganda. The defeat at the battle of Gettysburg was not the only cause of the reverse in southern fortunes, but it accelerated the disintegration of what had appeared to be the all-conquering Army of Northern Virginia. It took the south two decades to discover its symbolic importance. By the 1890s, it was regarded as the turning point, and the attack on 3 July as 'the high water mark' of the Confederacy – a perspective not realised by those enduring great suffering on the field of battle at the time.

Great conflicts like the American Civil War, fought over large distances and on an immense scale, are not decided in an afternoon. Yet Gettysburg, by neutering Lee's army, was a significant milestone on the road to Confederate defeat – a point that would take another 22 months of arduous travel before it was reached. **II**

**Brian Holden Reid** is professor of American history and military institutions, King's College, London, and has written several books on the American Civil War



# GENERALS IN COMMAND

When conflict tore apart the United States, military leaders who had once served together had to choose sides according to their consciences.

**Terry L Jones** outlines the achievements and failings of key commanders



## **ULYSSES S GRANT (1822–85)**

**Had great success on the battlefield, but hated pomp and ceremony**

AN OHIO NATIVE, Grant graduated from West Point Military Academy in 1843 and was awarded two brevets (honorary promotions) for gallantry in the Mexican War, but resigned his commission in 1854 to avoid a court martial for drunkenness. After becoming a colonel of the 21st Illinois when the civil war began, he was promoted rapidly as he defeated the South at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga. In 1864, Grant was promoted to general-in-chief and forced Robert E Lee's army to surrender at Appomattox the following year.

Grant was, perhaps, the best general of the war, but there was nothing in his personal appearance to suggest greatness. One man described him as a "short, round-shouldered man... [with] rather a scrubby look". Shy, quiet, humble and unassuming, Grant distained pomp and ceremony, and usually wore a private's coat with his general's insignia sewn on the shoulder.

Although Grant enjoyed great battlefield success, he was frequently criticised for a seeming indifference to heavy casualties and accused of drunkenness. Lincoln, however, came to trust him because he rarely complained, did not blame others for his mistakes and did not constantly call for reinforcements.

Despite the criticism, Grant remained a popular figure after the civil war and was elected president in 1868 and 1872.



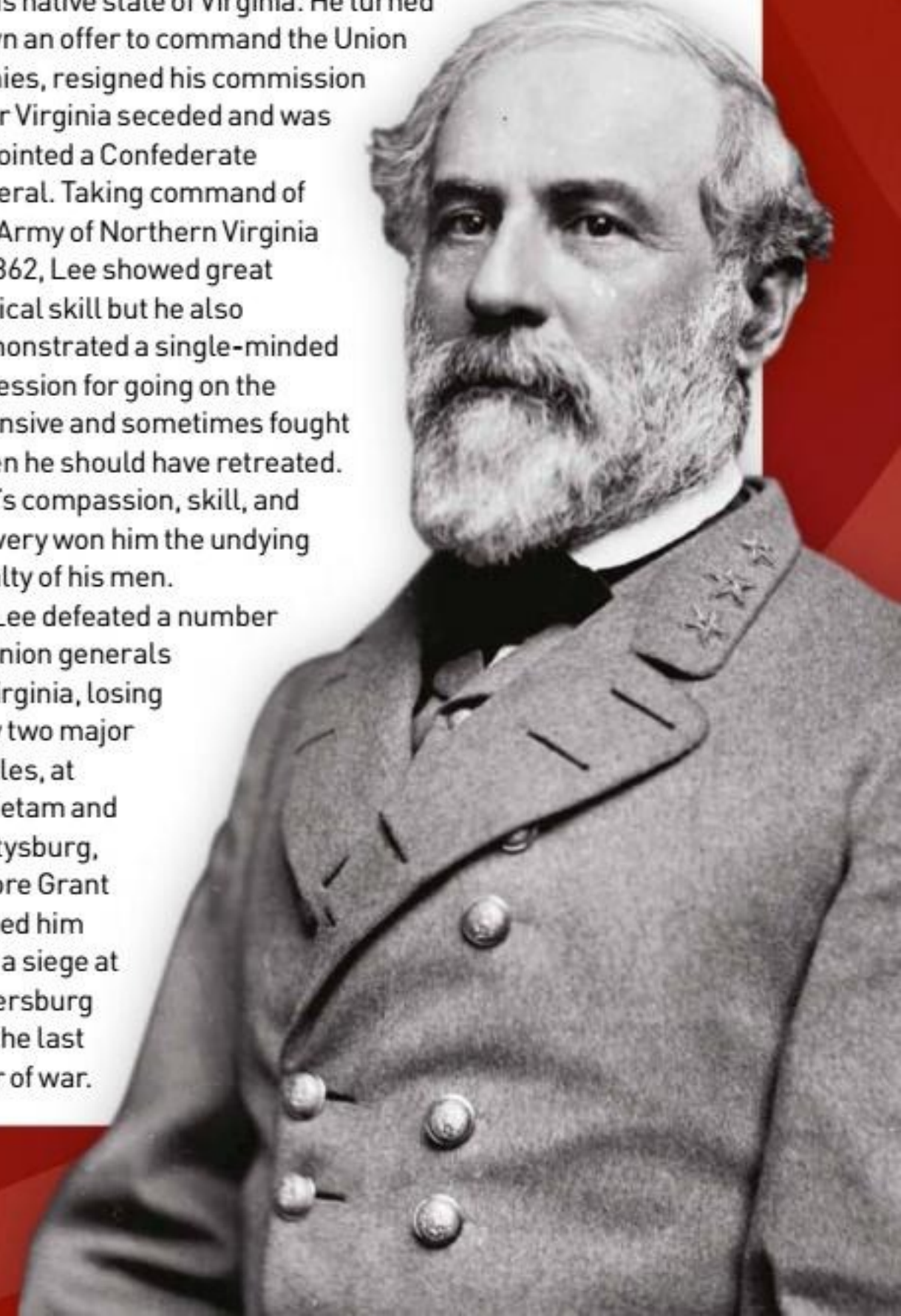
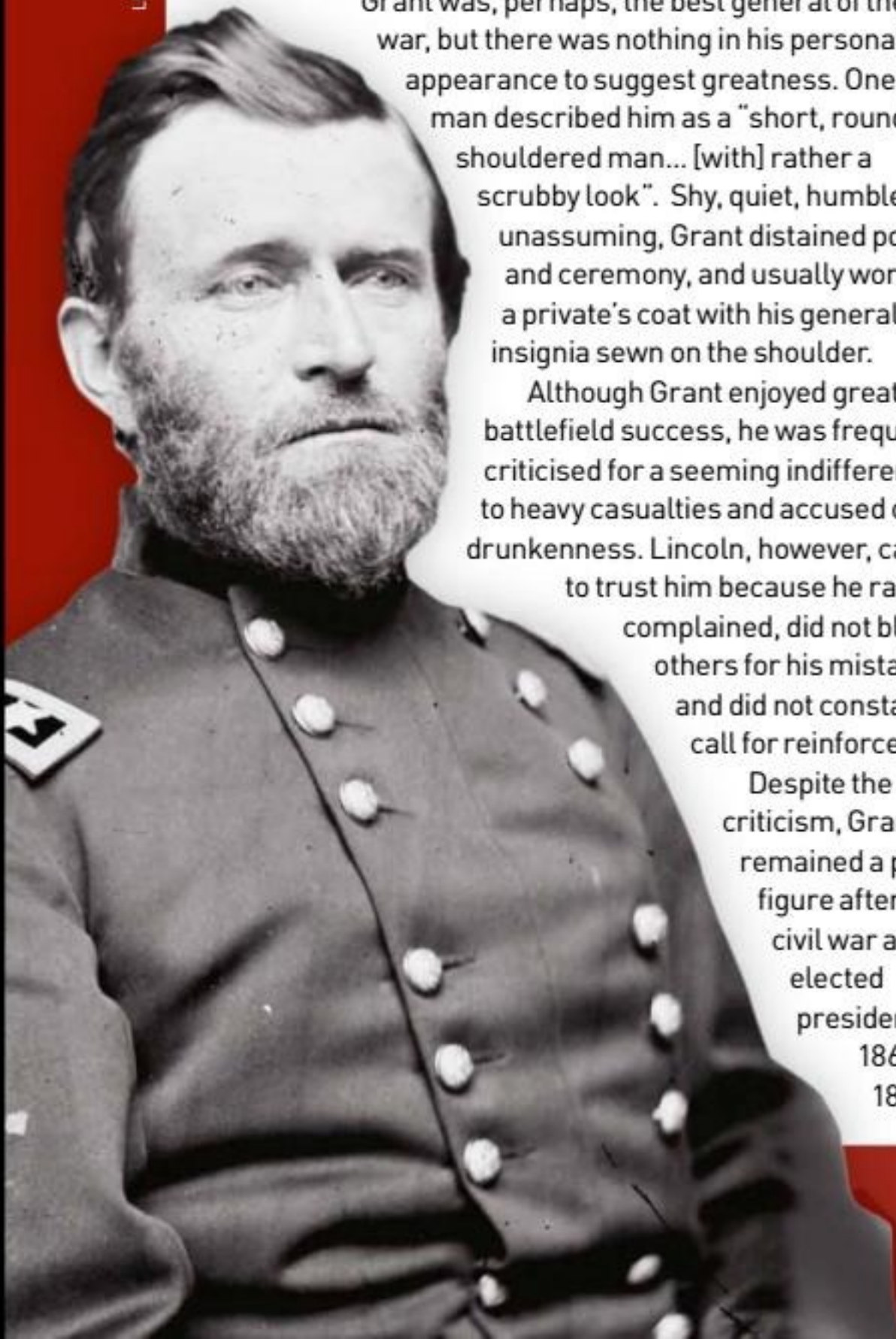
## **ROBERT E LEE (1807–70)**

**Great tactical skill combined with compassion and bravery**

LEE GRADUATED SECOND in the 1829 West Point class and earned three brevets during the Mexican War. Before the civil war he served as superintendent of West Point, commanded the marines that captured the abolitionist John Brown, and became lieutenant colonel of the Second US Cavalry. His wife, Mary Custis, was Martha Washington's great-granddaughter. Her plantation was confiscated during the civil war and turned into Arlington National Cemetery.

Although Lee opposed secession, his greatest loyalty was to his native state of Virginia. He turned down an offer to command the Union armies, resigned his commission after Virginia seceded and was appointed a Confederate general. Taking command of the Army of Northern Virginia in 1862, Lee showed great tactical skill but he also demonstrated a single-minded obsession for going on the offensive and sometimes fought when he should have retreated. Lee's compassion, skill, and bravery won him the undying loyalty of his men.

Lee defeated a number of Union generals in Virginia, losing only two major battles, at Antietam and Gettysburg, before Grant forced him into a siege at Petersburg for the last year of war.







**GEORGE B  
McCLELLAN (1826–85)**  
Popular but overly cautious in battle

A MEMBER OF a prominent Pennsylvania family, McClellan graduated second in the West Point class of 1846 and earned two brevets in the Mexican War. He taught at West Point, and served as an observer during the Crimean War. Despite this excellent record, he resigned his captain's commission in 1857 to seek his fortune in the railroad industry.

Appointed a general when the civil war began, McClellan took command of the Union army around Washington, DC. He quickly bonded with the Army of the Potomac (the primary Union force in the eastern theatre of the war) by restoring discipline and equipping the men for future operations. Known as Little Mac, McClellan was the army's most popular commander, but he made enemies among the Radical Republicans (a loose faction of politicians within the Republican Party) because he was a conservative Democrat who opposed freeing the slaves.

On the battlefield, McClellan was slow, overly cautious and constantly overestimated the enemy's numbers. After advancing to the outskirts of Richmond, Virginia, he was defeated by Robert E Lee in the Seven Days campaign (June–July 1862) and was temporarily shelved by President Lincoln. When Lee defeated another Union army in the second Bull Run campaign, Lincoln restored McClellan to command, and he did a superb job whipping the men into shape for the Antietam campaign of late summer 1862.

However, McClellan continued to overestimate the enemy's strength and moved too slowly, even after Lee's campaign plans fortuitously fell into his hands. McClellan defeated Lee at Antietam, but Lincoln relieved him when he made no effort to pursue the retreating enemy.

Despite his recurring difficulties with the Lincoln administration, McClellan remained popular with many people. The Democratic Party nominated him for president in 1864, but he suffered a stinging defeat. After the war, he re-entered politics and was elected governor of New Jersey.



**THOMAS J JACKSON  
(1824–63)**  
Highly respected on both sides

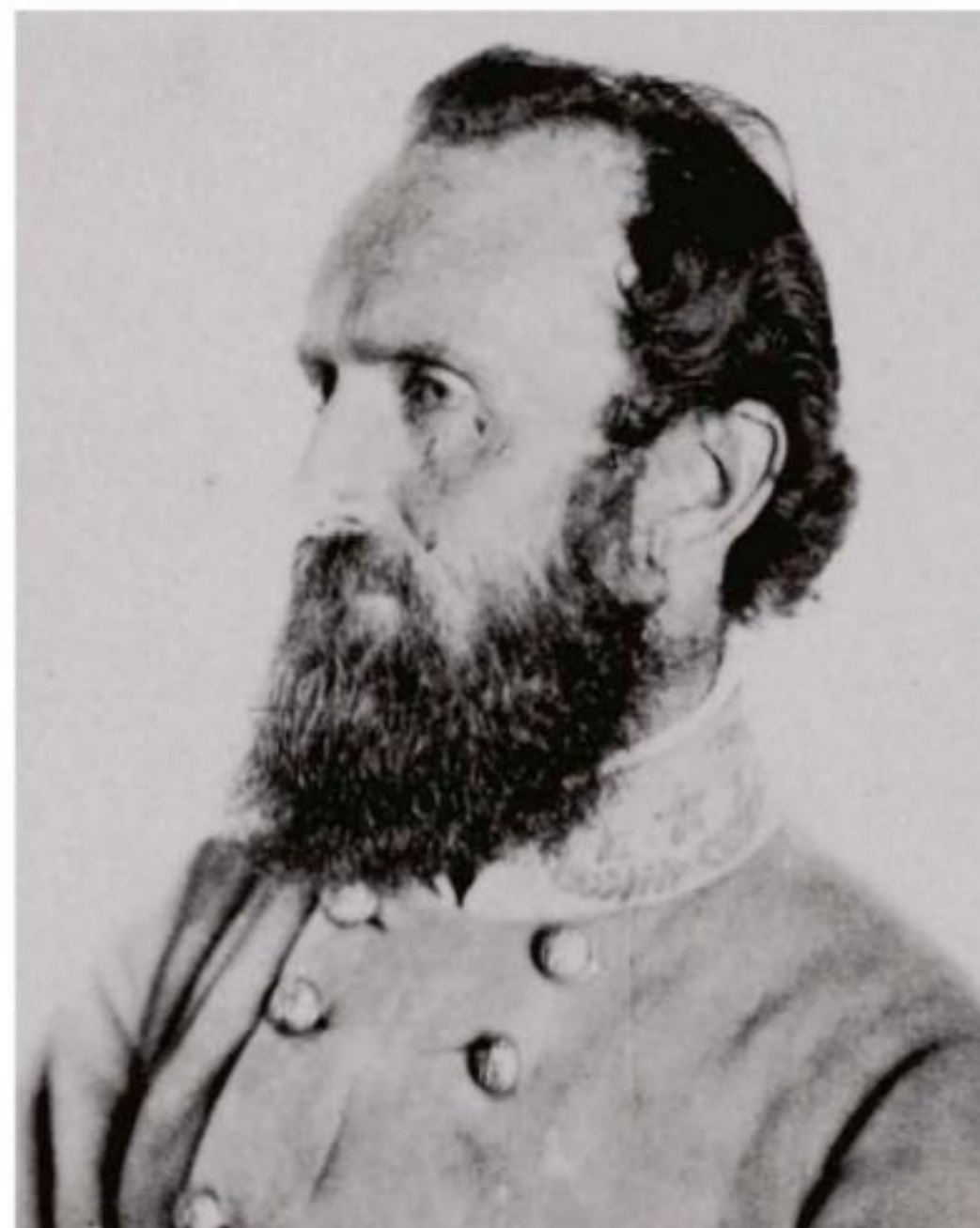
BORN IN MODERN-DAY West Virginia, Thomas J Jackson graduated from West Point in 1846 and was brevetted twice in the Mexican War, but he later resigned his lieutenant's commission to accept a teaching position at the Virginia Military Institute. Although a poor teacher, somewhat eccentric and perhaps a hypochondriac, he was a friendly man with people he knew well, a loving husband and enjoyed the company of children. A devout Presbyterian, Jackson refused to read letters or fight on Sunday if it could be avoided, attended church faithfully and sponsored a Sunday school for African-Americans.

Appointed a Confederate general, Jackson earned his famous nickname 'Stonewall' Jackson at the first battle of Bull Run when his brigade held the field's high ground like a 'stone wall'. Jackson rose to the rank of lieutenant general and became one of Robert E Lee's most trusted subordinates.

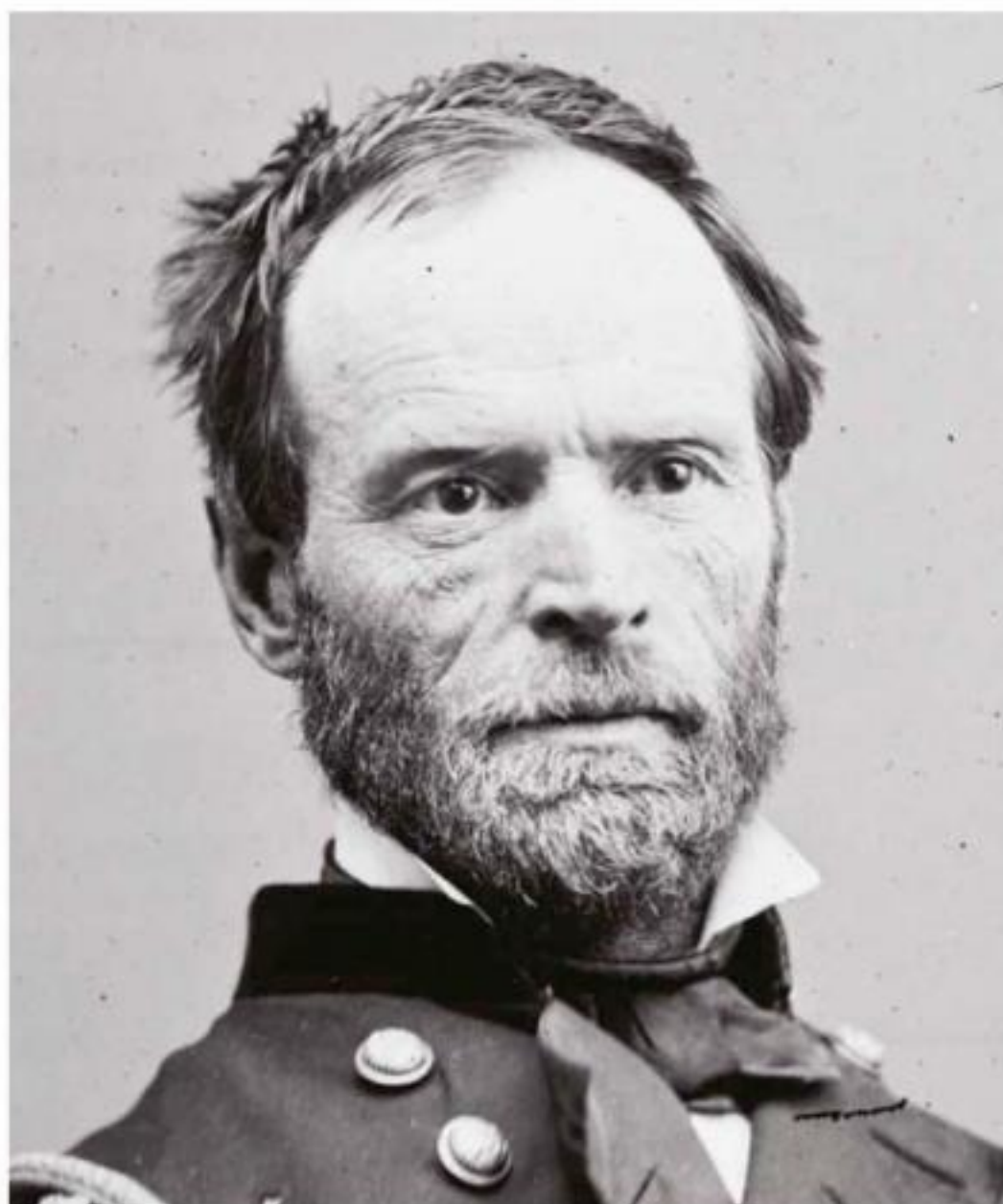
Jackson performed brilliantly in the Shenandoah Valley and second Bull Run campaigns, but he was not infallible. His service in the Seven Days campaign was disappointing and his line was temporarily broken at Fredericksburg because he failed to place troops at a vulnerable point. Subordinates also frequently complained of Jackson's harsh discipline and secrecy, and more than one general was arrested for not living up to Jackson's high standards.

Nonetheless, Jackson's men formed a close bond with their chief and even the enemy was awestruck. One officer, recalling an incident when Jackson rode by some Union prisoners, wrote: "Many of them saluted as he passed and he invariably returned the salute."

Tragically, Jackson was accidentally shot by his own men in the battle of Chancellorsville and died of pneumonia after his left arm was amputated.







## **WILLIAM T SHERMAN (1820–91)**

**Criticised for targeting civilians**

SHERMAN, KNOWN TO his friends as 'Cump', was a member of a prominent Ohio family. He graduated from West Point in 1840 and served as an administrative officer in California before resigning his commission and engaging in a number of failed business ventures. Rejoining the army when the civil war began, he led a brigade at the first battle of Bull Run. He was then promoted to general and sent to Kentucky.

Tall and angular, with a rough face and short red hair and beard, Sherman had a brilliant mind and abundant nervous energy. This natural nervousness and the stress of command eventually led to an emotional collapse and he began predicting imminent disaster. Sherman was relieved of duty, but a lengthy rest restored his spirits, and he became a division commander under Ulysses S Grant.

Sherman fought well at Shiloh and was one of Grant's most trusted corps commanders in the Vicksburg campaign. He then led the Army of the Tennessee at Chattanooga and took over the Military Division of the Mississippi when Grant became general-in-chief. Sherman's greatest contribution to the war effort was in the last year of fighting when his Atlanta campaign, March to the Sea and Carolinas campaign destroyed southern morale.

Sherman was always popular with his men and they bestowed upon him the affectionate nickname 'Uncle Billy'. However, he often appeared to be a coldhearted killer because of the way he targeted civilians to destroy the enemy's ability to wage war. When Confederate General John Bell Hood complained of his evicting the citizens of Atlanta, Georgia, Sherman responded to the city's fathers, "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it."

After the civil war, Sherman replaced Grant as general-in-chief. In this capacity, he directed the post-war military actions against American Indians.



## **BRAXTON BRAGG (1817–76)**

**A talent for organisation but inconsistent on the battlefield**

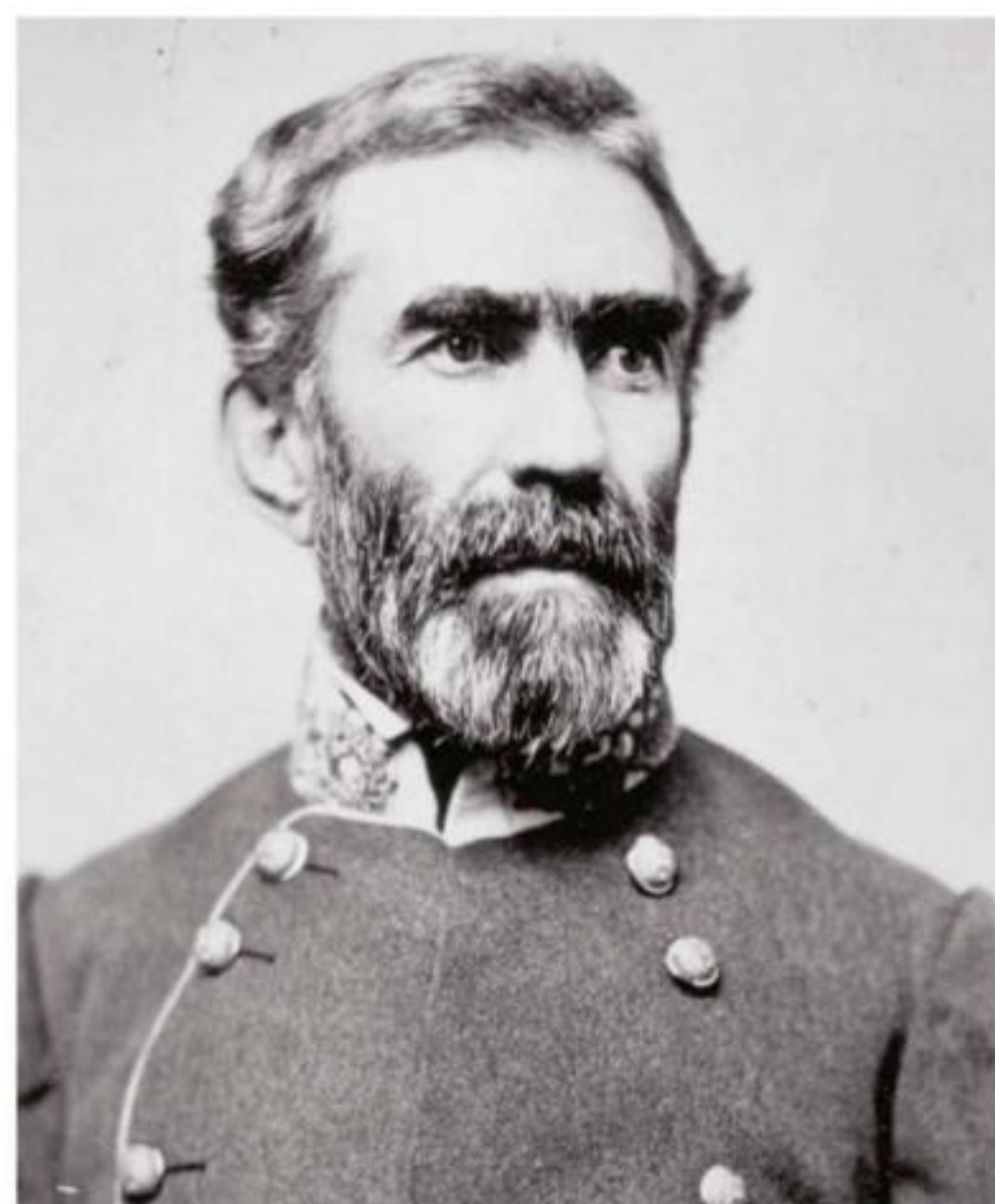
A NATIVE OF North Carolina, Bragg graduated from West Point in 1837. He was brevetted for gallantry three times during the Mexican War, but his caustic personality made him unpopular, and a soldier once tried to assassinate him by exploding a 12-pound shell under his cot. Bragg resigned his captain's commission in 1856 to become a sugar planter.

Appointed a Confederate general when the civil war began, Bragg skilfully defended Mobile, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida; commanded a corps at the battle of Shiloh; and was given command of the Army of Tennessee in June 1862. He quickly demonstrated his talent for discipline and organisation by whipping the army into shape, but many soldiers turned against him because he seemed eager to execute deserters.

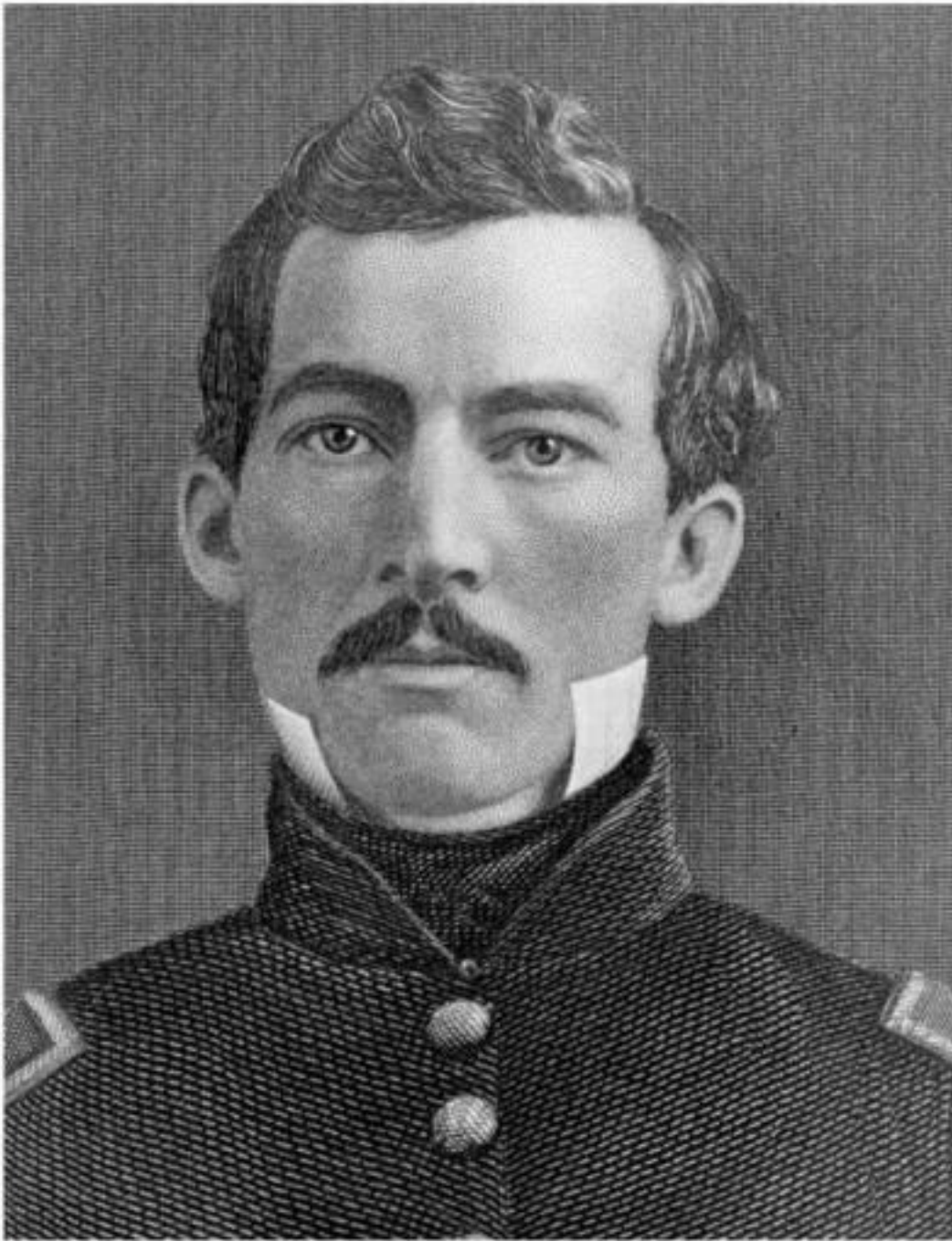
Bragg compiled a chequered record with the Army of Tennessee. During the 1862 Kentucky campaign, he won some impressive battles but then retreated. At Stones River, Bragg achieved tactical success on the first day but then retreated again. His only great victory was at Chickamauga, but a few months later Ulysses S Grant defeated him at Chattanooga. Humiliated, Bragg asked to be relieved of army command. Jefferson Davis complied but then brought him to Richmond where he served ably as the president's military adviser and general-in-chief.

Bragg excelled in preparing an army to fight, but he did not have the decisiveness needed to lead it to victory and his irritable temper prevented him from getting along with his subordinates. Nonetheless, he was a capable officer whose failures could sometimes be attributed to subordinates not following his orders.

After the war, Bragg worked as a civil engineer and railroad executive. Today, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is named after him.







### PHILIP H SHERIDAN (1831–88)

**A hothead, but adored by his troops**

SHERIDAN GREW UP in Ohio and at West Point became known as Little Phil because he was just five feet, five inches tall and weighed 120 pounds. Prickly and hot headed, he graduated in the middle of the 1853 class and then fought American Indians in Texas.

A year after the civil war began, Sheridan was appointed colonel of the Second Michigan Cavalry and his excellent combat record led to his rapid promotion to general. He played a key role in stopping the Confederate advance at Stones River; helped General George H Thomas hold the rebels at bay at Chickamauga; and at Chattanooga his men advanced without orders and captured Missionary Ridge. Ulysses S Grant was impressed with Sheridan's leadership and brought him to Virginia in 1864 to command the Army of the Potomac's cavalry corps.

After serving in the Overland campaign, Sheridan was sent to the Shenandoah Valley, where he defeated Jubal A Early's Confederate army and employed scorched-earth tactics in what Virginians called "the burning." After this victory, Sheridan rejoined Grant, smashed the Confederate defences at Petersburg, and led the pursuit of Lee during the Appomattox campaign.

Northerners credited Sheridan with helping to win the civil war, but Sheridan never looked like a war hero. Lincoln described him as "a brown, chunky little chap [with] not enough neck to hang him". Sheridan also had an oddly-shaped head that reminded one man of a flattened minie ball (a type of bullet). Despite his looks, soldiers adored their red-faced, cigar-smoking commander.

After the war, Sheridan commanded the forces fighting against the American Indians of the Great Plains.



### JOSEPH E JOHNSTON (1807–91)

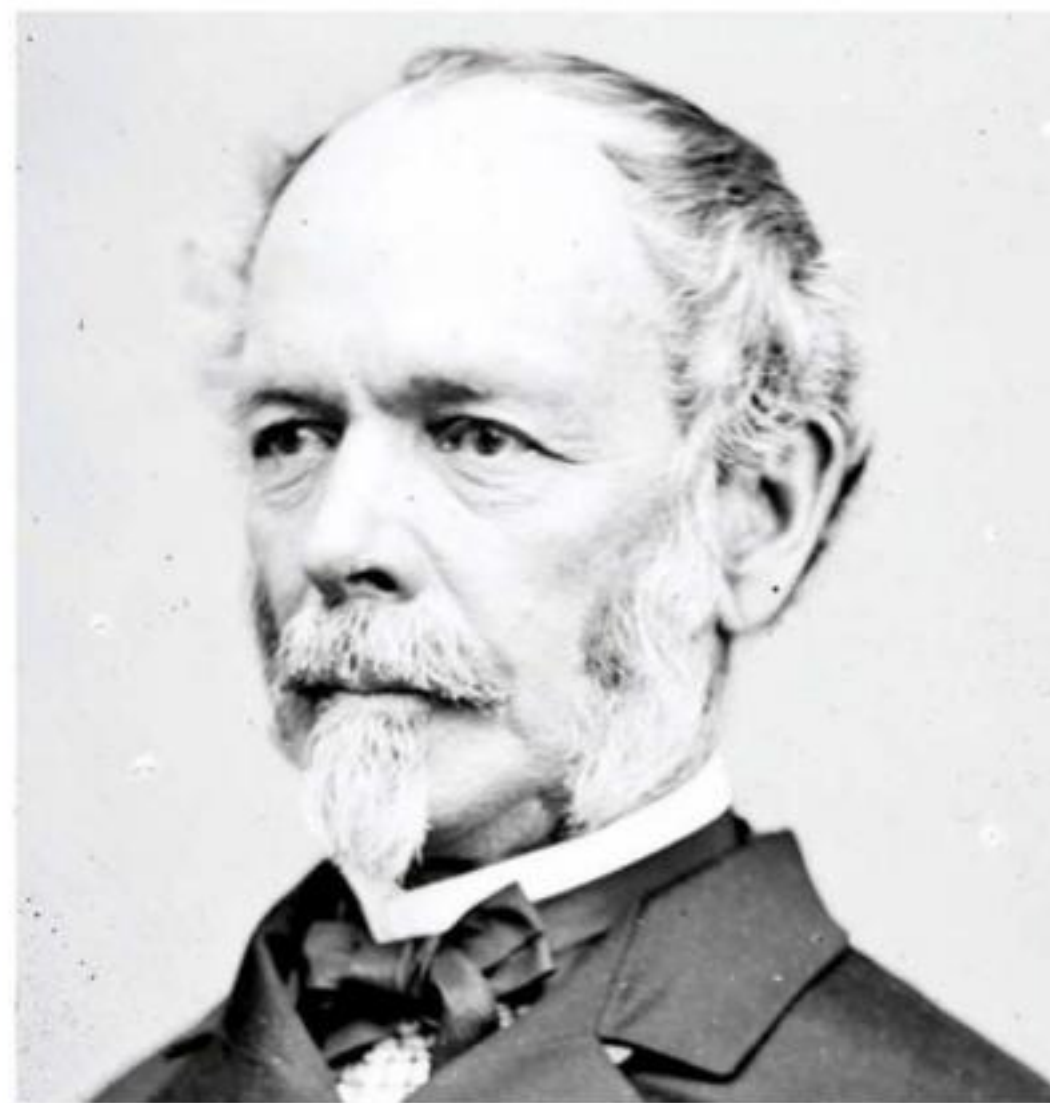
**Argued often with Davis**

AN 1829 WEST Point graduate from Virginia, 'Joe' Johnston saw extensive combat in both the Mexican and Seminole wars. Resigning his commission in 1861 to become a Confederate general, he was given command of northern Virginia but immediately became embroiled in a bitter feud with Confederate President Jefferson Davis over military seniority. For the rest of the war, the two men argued over strategy, logistics and responsibility.

When Johnston was wounded at the battle of Seven Pines in 1862, he lost command of the Virginia army to Robert E Lee, but Davis put him in charge of the Department of the West when he recovered. Johnston proved reluctant to assume responsibility and failed to help the trapped garrison at Vicksburg in 1863, even though he had a sizeable army of his own nearby.

Davis was convinced Johnston was useless as a field commander, but the general had strong military and political support, and he was popular with the troops. Davis reluctantly appointed him as the commander of the Army of Tennessee after it was defeated at Chattanooga, and Johnston quickly restored the men's morale by providing fresh supplies, equipment and furloughs. He then fought skillfully against William T Sherman in the Atlanta campaign, but his constant retreating angered Davis and eventually the president replaced him. In February 1865, Davis put Johnston in command of the Confederate forces in the Carolinas, but he could do little to stop Sherman and finally surrendered in late April 1865.

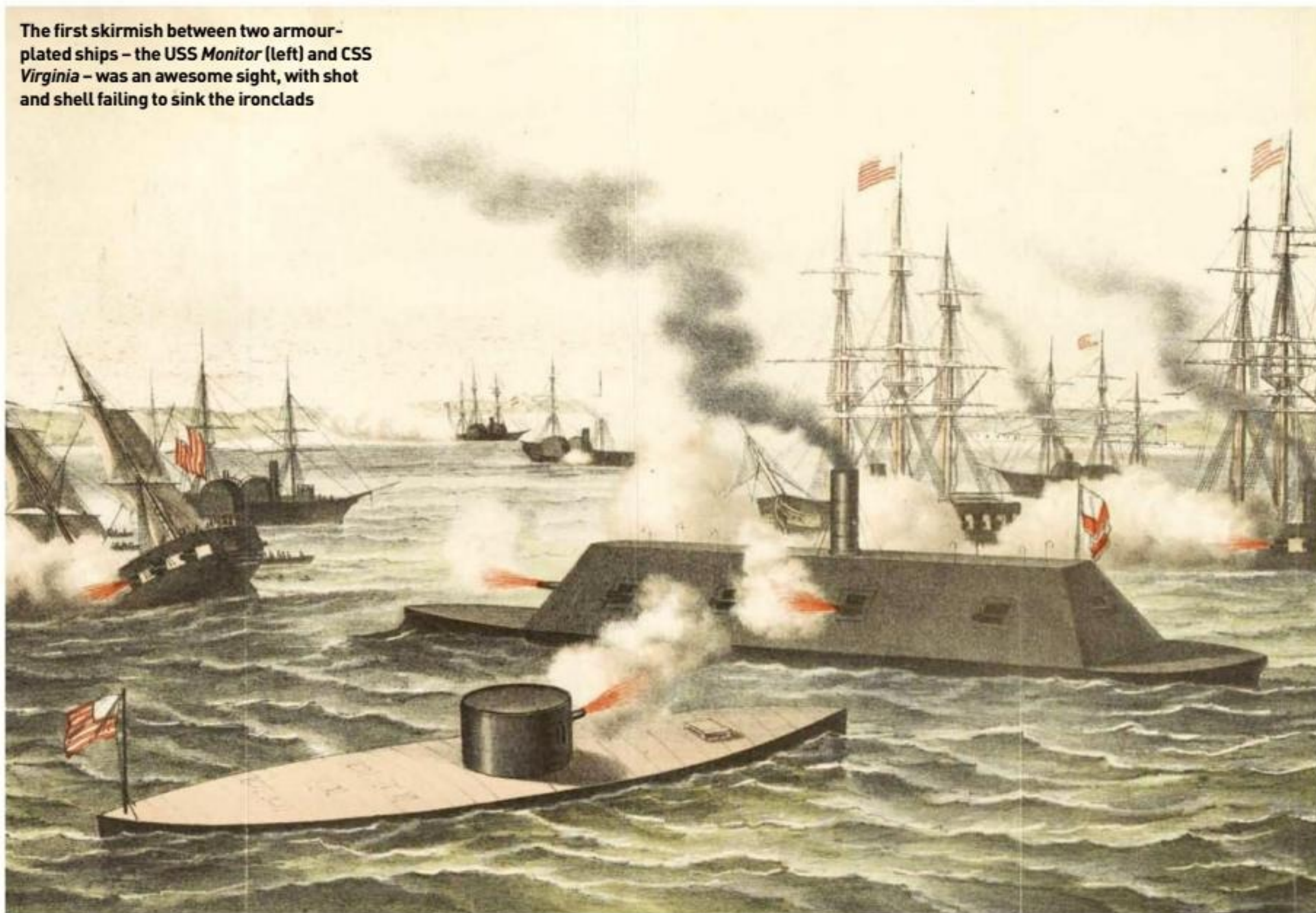
After the war, Johnston worked in various business ventures, was elected to Congress and was appointed a federal railroad commissioner. He died in 1891 after having served as an honorary pallbearer at the funerals of both Grant and Sherman. **H**



Terry L Jones is professor of history at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. His books include *The American Civil War* (McGraw-Hill, 2009)



The first skirmish between two armour-plated ships – the USS *Monitor* (left) and CSS *Virginia* – was an awesome sight, with shot and shell failing to sink the ironclads



# How naval power shaped the war

Encounters between Confederate and Union ships on inland rivers and in coastal waters were crucial in determining the outcome of the civil war. Naval historian **Andrew Lambert** explores the importance of the nautical conflict

**I**N JANUARY 1861, as tension grew between South and North, South Carolina's Confederate artillery fired on the steamer *Star of the West* as she entered Charleston harbour to resupply the US Army at Fort Sumter. This salvo was an early indication of the nature of the war to come, which, despite being waged on a single continent between foes with vast land

frontiers, was to a large degree determined by sea power. There is no doubt that Union naval might shaped both the conduct and outcome of the conflict. Union sea power wrecked the Southern economy, split the Confederacy and restored the Union, enforcing northern values in the process.

This was no accident: Americans understood the strategic impact of such

dominance, having studied the Crimean War. Between 1853 and 1856, sea power enabled Britain and France to invade Russia, destroy the Sevastopol naval base and, through British threats to destroy St Petersburg by naval bombardment, end the war.

In addition, new weapons had been introduced in the Crimean War, such as mines, submarines, rifled artillery (giving



greater range and accuracy) and ironclads – steam-powered warships protected by iron or steel.

During the American Civil War, there would be no great fleet battles for command of the seas, and only an handful of single-ship actions. Indeed, the South lost the naval war on day one: at that time it had no warships, few officers and no men. The majority of southern naval officers and enlisted men remained loyal to the Union. Having represented America abroad, their loyalties were national rather than local.

Furthermore, the South lacked shipbuilding and industrial plant to build ironclads and fast cruisers. The Confederate secretary of the navy Stephen Mallory created a fleet from nothing, but could not compete with the far larger Union fleet, while Confederate President Jefferson Davis ignored the needs of the navy in favour of the army.

### Blockade of the South

Three months after they attacked *Star of the West*, the Confederates launched an assault on Fort Sumter itself – the ‘first shot’ that heralded the civil war was fired on 12 April. A week after the loss of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln ordered a blockade of the South, denying the Confederates access to foreign arms and equipment, as well as the opportunity to export cotton.

General Winfield Scott’s ‘Anaconda Plan’, proposed in May 1861, added to this a powerful attack down the Mississippi River to cut the Confederacy in half. The Union would use its superior industrial and manpower resources to impose the blockade, exploiting the many navigable

rivers to divide and crush the Confederacy. It would be maintained by warships and converted merchant vessels, and tightened by amphibious operations to secure key coastal locations. The Union’s first major victory came on 7 November 1861, when Port Royal Sound, between Charleston and Savannah, was seized as a base.

The blockade was never perfect. Fast steamers, mostly British, ran between Bermuda, Nassau and Havana and the Atlantic and Mexican Gulf ports, carrying food, guns, steam engines, brandy, corsets and anything else southerners wanted, in exchange for cotton. Relying on speed and darkness, few were captured.

## General Scott’s ‘Anaconda Plan’ included a powerful attack down the Mississippi to cut the Confederacy in half

By striking from the sea and along major rivers (eschewing railways, which were easily destroyed by Confederate raiders), Union forces carved the Confederacy into isolated fragments.

The Mississippi River slices America in two, flowing from Minnesota in the far north to the Gulf of Mexico at New Orleans

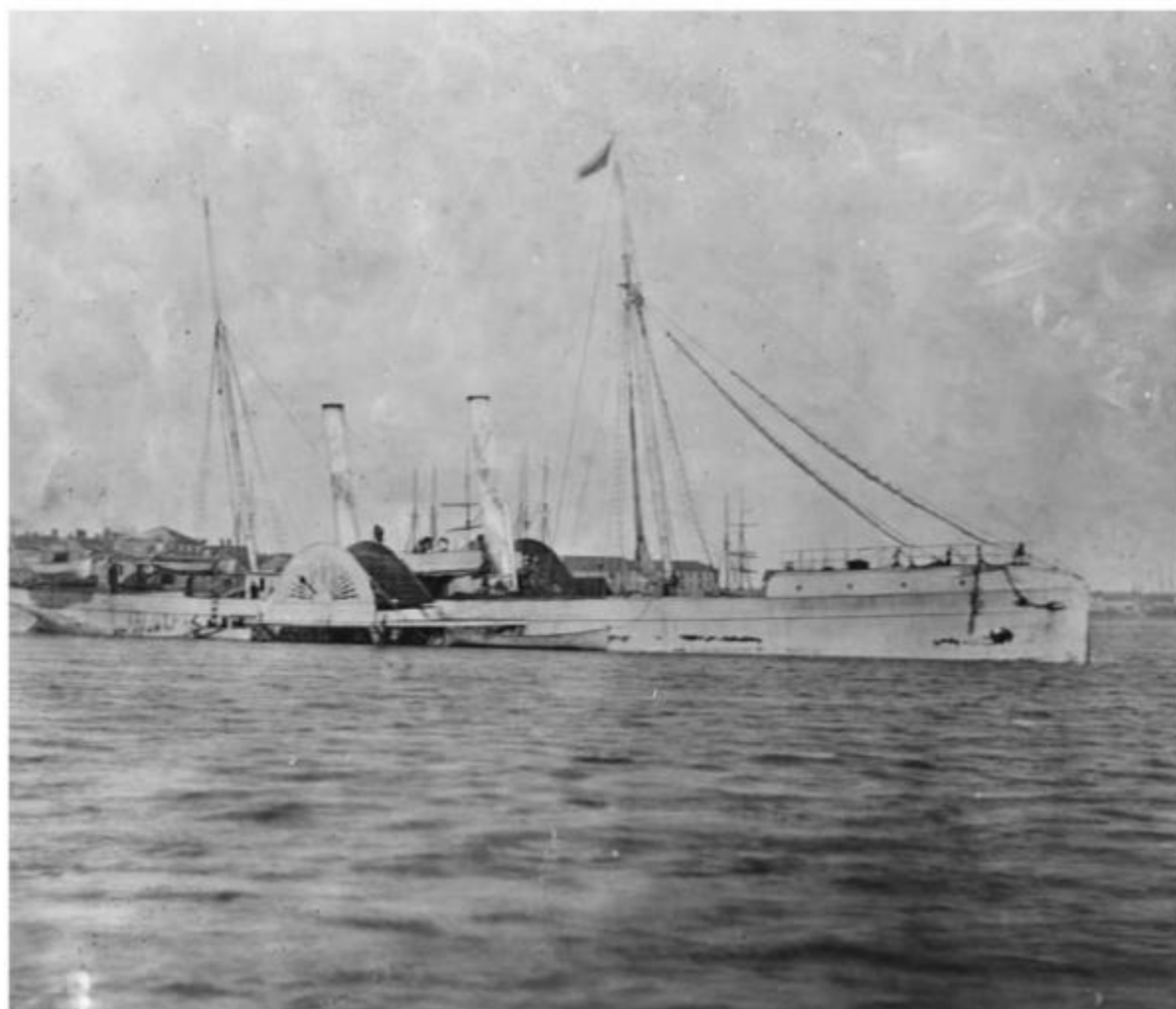
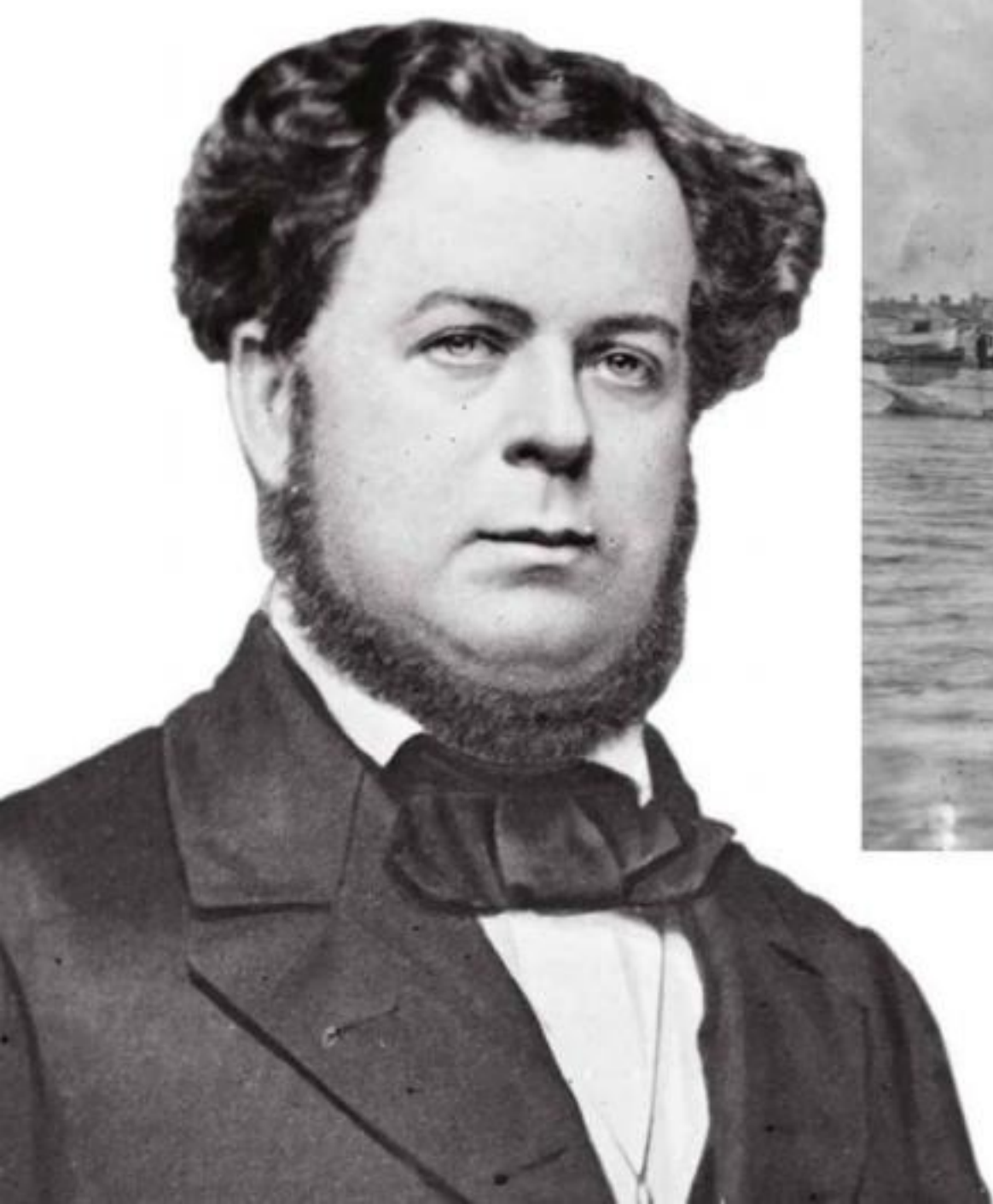
in the south. Naturally, the river was a strategic objective for both sides. Early in 1862 a Union offensive moved south down the river, spearheaded by new ironclads and quickly bypassing fixed defences, forcing the Confederates to abandon Kentucky. On 24 April 1862, Admiral David Farragut’s Union fleet, heading north from the river’s delta in the Gulf of Mexico, steamed past forts defending New Orleans with trifling losses.

The city surrendered, securing the southern end of the Mississippi for the Union. In effect, in doing so, the South lost the war, because it could not win with its economic centre in Union hands.

After a naval battle at Memphis on 6 June 1862, the Union river fleet linked up with Farragut, taking control of the vast Mississippi and splitting the Confederacy in two. Only the harbour town of Vicksburg held out, finally surrendering on 4 July 1863 – the day after the battle of Gettysburg shattered Confederate hopes in the east.

### Hamessing the Sea

With the direct route to the South’s capital, Richmond in Virginia, blocked by Confederate armies, in early 1862 General George McClellan shifted the Union’s Army of the Potomac by sea to the Virginia Peninsula. Despite this strategic insight, McClellan’s irresolute leadership ➤



Left: Stephen Mallory, the Confederate secretary of the navy, shaped the South’s naval force  
Above: Sleek and fast, a British steamer runs the blockade off Fort Monroe, Virginia, risking attack from Union forces in order to trade with the South



➤ wasted the opportunity to seize the Confederate capital.

The Union's campaign was threatened by the large Confederate ironclad CSS (Confederate States ship) *Virginia*, which sank two Union sailing warships on 8 March and fought the USS (Union States ship) *Monitor* the following day.

The first battle between ironclads lasted four hours. The vessels hammered away at point-blank range, firing 9- and 11-inch shot and shell that could sink wooden ships with just one or two hits – yet, behind their armour plate, the crews were concussed but undefeated. Both ships retired, dented and shaken. The *Monitor*, a novel design with a single revolving turret mounting two heavy guns, became an emblem of Union sea power and subsequently lent its name to all coastal Union ironclads.

The resultant standoff sustained the blockade but prevented McClellan's army from using the James river, the direct route to Richmond. Two years later, Grant would use the same river system to outflank Confederate defences, marching round Richmond from river to river. His strategy reflected hard-won experience in the west, at Shiloh and Vicksburg, and excellent relations between army and navy.

Though the North had a near monopoly on naval power, ending the war with

more than 600 vessels, it remained a limited force. There were fewer than 30 ironclads capable of engaging their Confederate forts and counterparts.

Many existing warships were too big for the shallow Confederate coast, and converted merchant ships had limited fighting power. Consequently the North reserved its ironclads for specific offensives. These included a naval attack on Charleston, the 'heart of the Confederacy', on 7 April 1863. This skirmish involved most Union sea-going

### The vessels hammered away at point-blank range, firing shot and shell that could sink wooden ships

ironclads, but with only two heavy guns the monitors could not destroy the numerous harbour defence batteries.

The next major offensive, Farragut's attack on Mobile Bay on 5 August 1864, augmented ironclads with wooden steamers. This vital Southern harbour was defended by batteries, mines, and an ironclad. Despite losing one monitor to mines Farragut pressed on. As the crew of his flagship, the wooden steam sloop USS *Hartford*, could hear the fuses of the moored

mines clicking, the admiral, from his vantage point in the lower rigging, shouted to Captain Drayton: "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" No more mines exploded. Farragut captured the ironclad CSS *Tennessee* and sealed the harbour, closing the Gulf Coast to blockade runners.

The final amphibious operation of the war was the capture of the Confederate Fort Fisher, which defended the sea approaches to Wilmington, North Carolina, the last blockade-runner port. A month after a bungled attempt in mid-December 1864, 60 warships were assembled to bombard Confederate defences while marines and soldiers stormed the fort. Without supplies from Wilmington, the Confederacy could not keep troops in the field.

### Confederates fight back

In an attempt to divert Union ships from the blockade and coastal offensives, the Confederacy sent a few cruisers to destroy northern commerce. However, their impact was marginal and eventually the raiders were hunted down.

The iconic CSS *Alabama*, which had enjoyed a stunning career ranging from Britain to the Indian Ocean and South Pacific, was pursued and cornered at Cherbourg, France, by the ironclad USS *Kearsarge*. The CSS *Alabama* was sunk in a



CORBIS X2, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Rear Admiral David Farragut (right) and Captain Percival Drayton aboard the USS *Hartford*, which fought at the battles of New Orleans, Vicksburg and Mobile Bay





*Battle of Mobile Bay* by Louis Prang. This engagement on 5 August 1864 saw David Farragut's fleet run the gauntlet of Confederate mines to secure victory

battle that lasted a little more than an hour on 19 June 1864.

The Confederate navy could not win the war at sea, but worked with the army to keep the Union out of the harbours and rivers of the South. The South had inherited a system of massive coastal forts, including Fort Sumter, but these were rendered obsolete by rifled artillery firing explosive shells. The loss of New Orleans demonstrated that old forts had to be reinforced and supported by new weapons.

The Union's fast-moving steam warships were countered by moored submarine mines, first used by the Russians in 1854. Detonated by contact or by electric signal, these had to be protected by shore batteries and local defence ironclads to prevent minesweeping. Confederate mines sank dozens of Union warships – indeed, more than any other weapon. In March 1865 alone, three ships were sunk on one river in Alabama.

The Confederates also developed the torpedo – a mine on a long spar, attached to a small steamer. This style of torpedo was also used in the first successful submarine attack in history. On 17 February 1864, the man-powered *HL Hunley* rammed its spar torpedo into the Union sloop-of-war *Housatonic* off Charleston. The Union ship sank, though most of the crew survived. *HL Hunley* subsequently went down with all hands.

By 1863, the Confederacy had developed a co-ordinated coastal defence strategy combining earthwork batteries, ironclad warships, fixed barriers and mines to control access to key rivers such as the James, and to keep open the vital ports for blockade runners.

However, this strategy forced the Confederates to spread their resources, without anywhere being strong enough to take the initiative. In contrast, the Union shifted resources from theatre to theatre, massing ships and troops at each decisive point and overwhelming the Confederates.

### Overwhelming odds

Despite limited manpower and resources, the Confederate navy restricted Union access to the interior of the south for three years. This was critical, because every successful civil war offensive relied on river- or sea-based logistics (railroads had limited capacity, were vulnerable to raids and slow to build). By holding the water frontiers, the South's navy bought the new nation time to consolidate – but, like the Confederacy itself, it could not resist overwhelming odds. Even so, as the Confederacy crumbled, its navy continued fighting. Confederate midshipmen escorted President Jefferson Davis and his gold reserves as they fled west.

For all the battles and bloodshed on land, sea power settled the war. It cut the South off



The crew of *USS Kearsarge* off Cherbourg, France, in June 1864, the month that vessel sank *CSS Alabama*

from outside support, broke the export-dominated southern economy, and ensured that the North could import key war materials. Sea and river logistics sustained every successful major Union offensive.

These lessons were not lost on one man who served afloat at this time, Captain Alfred T Mahan of the US Navy. His theory, that countries with dominant naval power have greater worldwide impact, has shaped the strategic thought of navies across the world ever since. **H**

**Andrew Lambert** is Laughton Professor of Naval History in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London



# ... PART THREE ...

## THE STORY OF THE WAR

With fighting concentrated in the southern states, the Union army waged all-out war, aimed at destroying the Confederacy's morale and crushing its capacity to wage war. As the conflict entered its final phase and the South put up determined opposition, both sides suffered huge losses



**Mob violence** Colonel Henry O'Brien, pictured being dragged along the ground, was captured, tortured to death and mutilated by rioters

### 23 New York City draft riots, 1863

NORTHERNERS ON THE home front may have been far from the sound of gunfire, but they still felt the impact of conflict. Few northerners opposed the war at the outset but, by 1862, two issues – emancipation and conscription – aroused fierce opposition. To many Democrats Lincoln was a tyrant, crushing the freedoms of Americans by pressing them into an abolitionist crusade.

The most dramatic incident of violent discontent took place in New York City on 13–16 July 1863. In some of the worst rioting in American history, thousands of

workers, most of them poor Irish immigrants, rampaged through the city in a howl of rage against attempts to implement the draft. They targeted the visible property of the rich and the offices of Lincoln-supporting newspapers. They also launched indiscriminate attacks on the black population of the city, lynching them and burning an orphan asylum. The rioters' targets reflected their perception of the Republicans destroying the white man's republic as they had known it. The total death toll is unknown but was probably over a

hundred. Order was restored by troops who marched north after the Battle of Gettysburg.

In retrospect, the riots were a watershed. In mainstream magazines such as *Harper's*, images of white men rioting to avoid fighting for the North in New York were deliberately contrasted with black Union soldiers launching a heroic failed assault on Fort Wagner near Charleston. The old race-based conception of citizenship, to which many northerners still clung, had never faced such a severe challenge.



## 24 Gettysburg address

THE MOST FAMOUS of Lincoln's speeches was a two-minute address to dedicate the military cemetery at Gettysburg on 19 November 1863. Lincoln was not even the main speaker – he wound up proceedings after a two-hour oration from Edward Everett. But it's Lincoln's words that endure: "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." The effect of this was to date the origins of the republic to the Declaration of Independence of 1776, with its grand preamble authored by Jefferson and appealing to the universal ideal of equality, rather than the more prosaic Federal Constitution of 1787. Lincoln was implying that the Constitution merely gave form to the nation, and

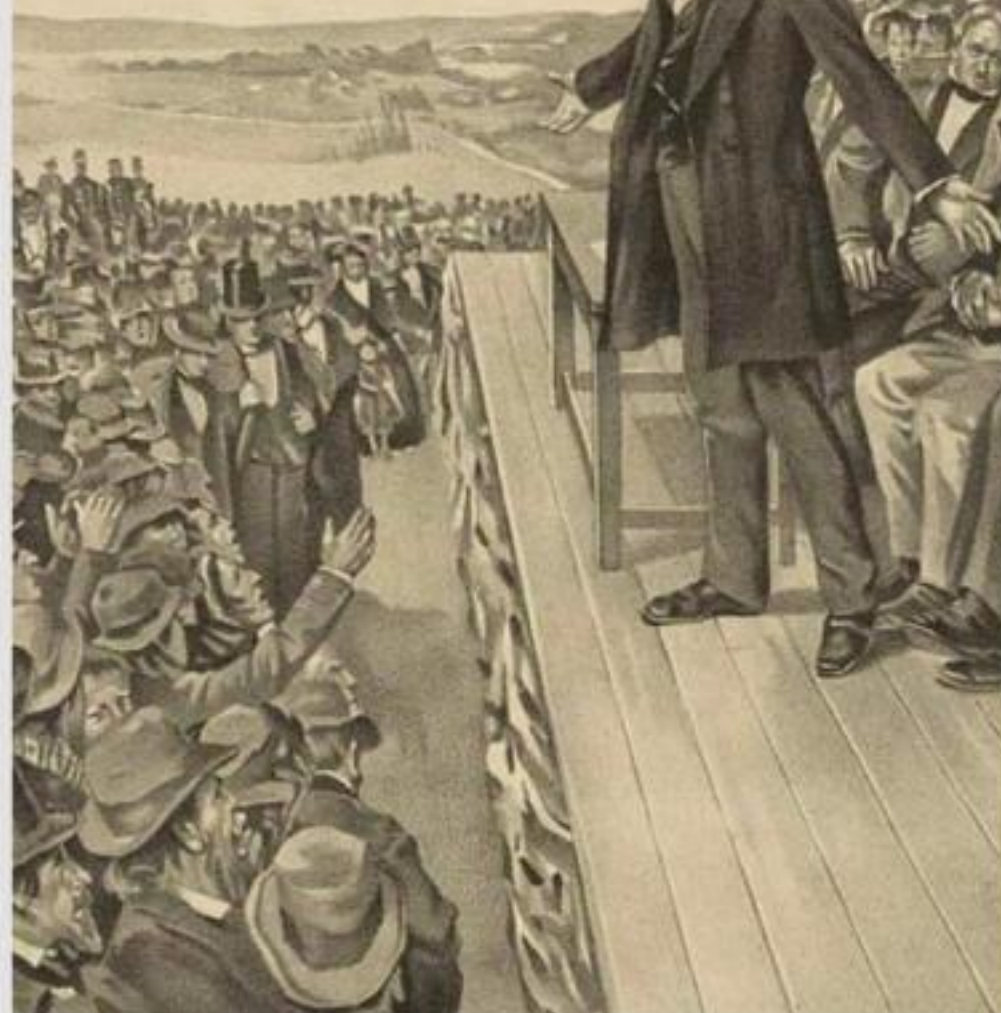
that the nation mattered not as an end in itself, but as an embodiment of the ideals of equality and liberty.

Echoing in secular language the Christian idea of a trial of faith, Lincoln went on to claim the civil war was a test of "whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure". In little under 300 words, he went on to explain why the struggle and the sacrifice had a dignity and a purpose of universal and transcendent significance: "That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Lincoln's eloquence was noted at the time, but the reputation of his Gettysburg address has grown over the years, as Americans have sought to find an uplifting meaning in the slaughter of the war.

### Historic speech

Lincoln's address at Gettysburg was brief yet succinct. His words are carved on the interior of the Lincoln Memorial



## 25 General Grant's spring campaign, 1864

GENERAL ULYSSES S Grant took command of all Union armies in early 1864 and adopted a harsh strategy designed to destroy the Confederacy's capacity to wage war. The spring campaign of 1864 differed from those of the previous three years in two ways. Firstly, Union forces now had an even greater advantage of numbers in most confrontations. In addition, rather than retreating after a setback, Grant ordered his men forward. Experienced soldiers used to long periods in camp followed by occasional terrifying battles now faced what seemed like continuous marching and fighting.

In the battle of the Wilderness, which took place from 5–7 May near the site of Lee's Chancellorsville victory in Virginia, Union forces failed to dislodge Lee from his position. Sparks from the muzzles of thousands of rifles set the woods on fire and thousands of wounded men burned to death. In two days



### Brutal war The battle of the Wilderness was the first engagement in the blood-soaked Overland Campaign

of fighting, the Union army suffered more than 17,000 casualties and the Confederates around 11,000.

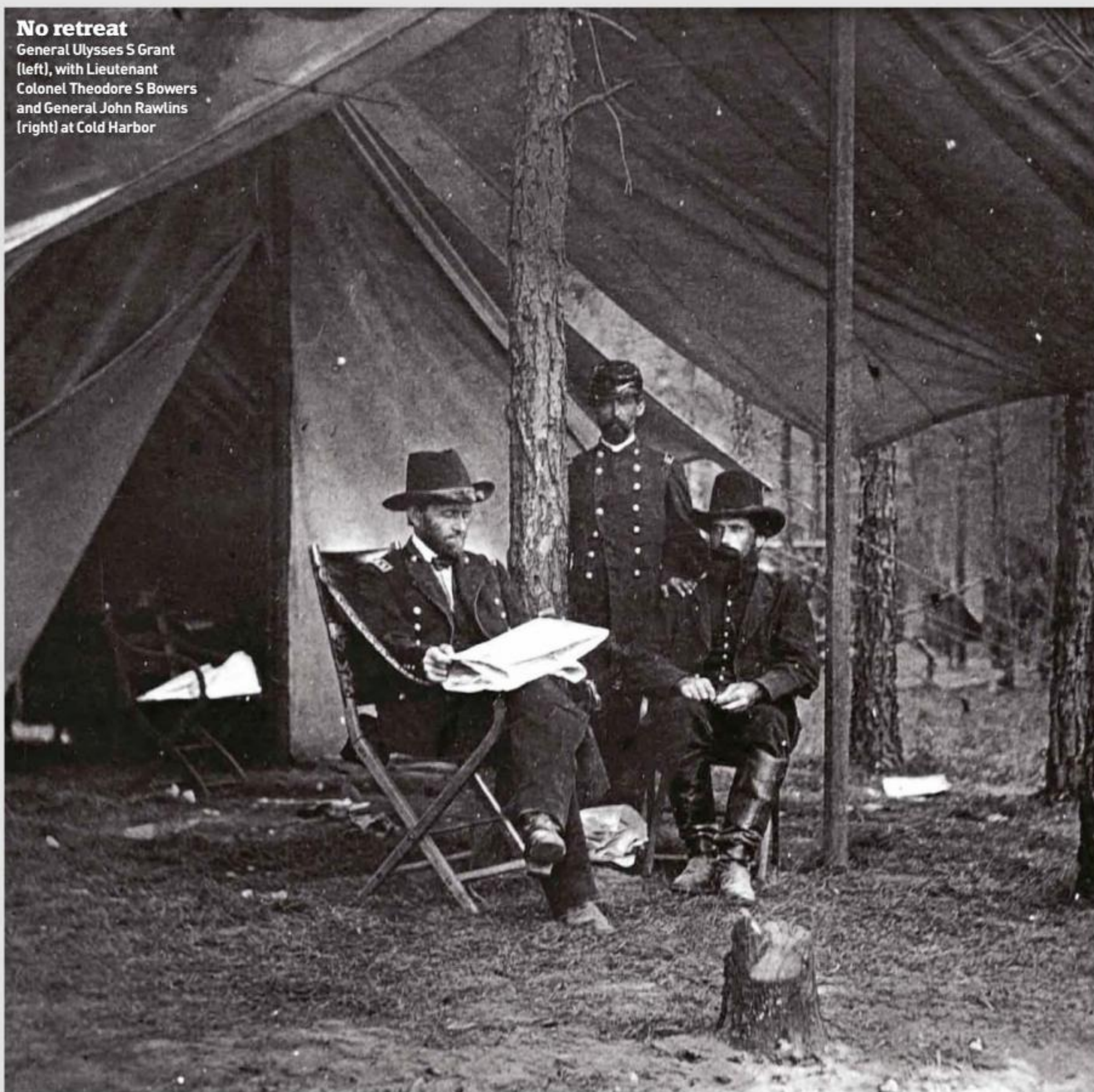
At the battle of the Wilderness and in the bloody engagements of the following three months, the losses on the Union side were

horrendous, but proportionally less than the South suffered. Grant, dubbed Butcher Grant by some in the north, had made the grim calculation that his Union army could withstand its losses more easily than the Confederacy.



### No retreat

General Ulysses S Grant (left), with Lieutenant Colonel Theodore S Bowers and General John Rawlins (right) at Cold Harbor



## 26 The battles of Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor, 1864

TIME AND AGAIN as Grant attacked through rural Virginia, Lee moved his army quickly before establishing powerful defensive lines. The action moved in an arc east and south as Grant tried to get through Lee's defences and Lee manoeuvred to keep his heavily out-numbered and out-gunned army between Richmond and Union forces. At Spotsylvania Court House on 12 May 1864, the South repulsed the North in a particularly vicious battle. Both sides fought intensely, especially

around the 'bloody angle', a U-shaped line of Confederate trenches that, by the end of the day, was filled with a mixture of blood, mud and corpses. Spotsylvania was essentially yet another defeat for the North. Grant had attempted to seize an important crossroads, Lee had beaten him to it and had then successfully, albeit bloodily, held off the Union's assault.

But Grant refused to treat it as a defeat. Instead, he attempted another large-scale flanking

movement to try to get between Lee and Richmond. Again, Lee anticipated the move. On 3 June, the Army of the Potomac was hurled against well-entrenched Confederate fortifications at Cold Harbor. More than any other civil war conflict, Cold Harbor was a harbinger of the horrific first day of the battle of the Somme. Most of the 7,000 Union soldiers who fell that day did so in less than an hour, as wave after wave of attacking troops were cut down.



## 27 The siege of Petersburg, 1864–85

THE ARMY OF the Potomac moved south from Cold Harbor and crossed the James River in another attempt to force Lee out from his trenches by flanking his army and seizing the key railroad junction at Petersburg, Virginia, just south of Richmond. Once again, before an assault took place, Lee realised what was happening and marched his army to thinly defended Petersburg with astonishing speed. Thousands of Union soldiers fell in futile efforts to dislodge the rebels from their earthwork entrenchments.

For the third year in a row, a Union army that set out in the spring with high hopes of crushing Confederate resistance in Virginia appeared by mid-summer to have stalled. Lee still had fewer troops, but Grant had lost more men – 64,000 casualties in two months – and morale sank. After

numerous failed assaults in June, July and August 1864, the Union army bedded in for a siege of Petersburg, extending a line of trenches south and west around the city. Romantic notions of valour were tested against the ever-present danger of being shot by snipers and constant artillery bombardment. Reflecting that reality, troops built 'bomb-proof' shelters and zigzag trenches. As one Ohio soldier put it, "The spade is more powerful than the cannon."

But battlefield defences could aid attackers too, since they enabled forces to be pushed close to the enemy lines, from where an overwhelming raid could be launched. Nevertheless, it wasn't until 2 April 1865 that Petersburg surrendered, on the same day the Confederates evacuated Richmond.



**Grim harbinger** A southern soldier lies dead at Petersburg in a scene that calls to mind the horrors that would follow in 1914–18

## 28 The fall of Atlanta and Sherman's March

WHILE GRANT WAS entrenching outside Petersburg, Union forces under the command of General William T Sherman made a momentous breakthrough at Atlanta, which fell to Union forces

on 2 September 1864. Under Grant's command, Sherman had helped to rout the Confederate Army of Tennessee under General Braxton Bragg, in the Chattanooga campaign which took place in the

previous October and November. Since then, Sherman had been pushing further into the Confederate heartland.

After Atlanta fell, his army embarked on a march to Savannah on the Georgia coast and from there, in the new year of 1865, turned north into South Carolina. This march was in line with Grant's strategic plan to move on all fronts simultaneously, thus stretching the South's limited resources. Its purpose was to destroy not only the crops, factories and railroads that sustained the Confederate war effort, but also to break the will of the southern people to keep on fighting with a demonstration of the military supremacy of the North.

Sherman was blunt: "We cannot change the hearts of those people of the South," he wrote, "but we can make war so terrible... [and] make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it." Sherman proposed to cut loose from his supply lines and "move through Georgia smashing things to the sea".



**Scene of destruction** Sherman's troops demolished towns, farms and railways on their March to the Sea



## 29 A holy war?

THE AMERICAN CIVIL War took place in a highly religious society, where both sides interpreted victory and defeat in terms of God's pleasure or displeasure.

This religiosity was an essential component in the capacity of both sides to endure horrendous losses. Clergymen told their congregations that war was a test of faith. And if it was a chastisement for sin, it was also an opportunity for national redemption and purification. Secular nationalist ideas about the sacrifice of war marking a coming of age for the American republic – or the creation of the Confederate nation – were reinforced by the religious notion of soil made sacred by a baptism of fraternal blood.

For many Confederates, faith was the basis of their nationalism. The Yankees were imagined to be

infidels. Confederate suffering was evidence that God had singled them out as a specially chosen people. On the other side, many northerners came to believe that God's purpose in creating such suffering must be as a punishment for slavery. In the great abolitionist anthem, 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic', Christ is seen in the "watch-fires of a hundred circling camps" and in the "burnished rows of steel" of the soldiers' bayonets. The Union army was the army of the Lord.

In his second inaugural address, Lincoln abjured any triumphalism and instead spoke of "this terrible war" as judgment on both sides for the offence of "American slavery". Perhaps, he speculated, only when "every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword" would the war end.



**Atonement** Lincoln believed that emancipation was God's wish, as was the fight to free all slaves in the United States of America



ALAMY, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X3

**Elected** A campaign banner for the 1864 Republican presidential candidate, shows Abraham Lincoln, and his running mate, Andrew Johnson, Tennessee's military governor

## 30 The 1864 election

NO ONE OF prominence ever suggested suspending elections during the war: after all, northerners claimed to be fighting for free government. But at the same time, organised opposition to the administration was seen by Lincoln's supporters as tantamount to treason.

In 1864, Lincoln ran for re-election against former general George B McClellan, whose Democratic supporters were united in opposition to emancipation but divided over whether to continue the war. For Republicans, the election was a test of loyalty to the national cause. "For four summers the loyal North has been firing bullets at the rebellion," ran a typical editorial. "The time has now come to fire ballots."

Lincoln gained 55 per cent of the popular vote in the November election. This was a convincing if hardly overwhelming endorsement. The strength of the Democratic vote, even in the face of a campaign branding support for McClellan as a vote for the rebels, was a measure of northerners' discontent over the transformations the conflict had brought about.

But the victory was enough. It was a ratification of the policy of war until the South surrendered and a rejection of any alternative path of negotiations. What's more, Lincoln had been elected on a platform that committed him to support the proposed Thirteenth Amendment ending slavery. It was the first time that a major party had run with what amounted to an abolitionist platform. Lincoln used the political capital from his victory to push Congress to pass the amendment before the war came to an end, thus clarifying the legal status of freed slaves and avoiding what would have been the legal challenges to the validity of the Emancipation Proclamation.



## 31 Southern surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, 1865

AFTER ONE FINAL fling at the Union trenches outside Petersburg, Lee's men retreated from one line of trenches to the next and escaped west across the Appomattox river. On 2 April, in anticipation of the fall of Petersburg, the Confederate government abandoned Richmond, setting its offices on fire, loading its treasury and archives into railroad cars and fleeing west. The following day the Confederate capital was in Union hands.

The half-starved remnants of the Army of Northern Virginia, now grossly outnumbered by the Army of the Potomac, were chased into the remote south-west corner of Virginia. On 8 April, Union cavalry overtook Lee's army and captured three trainloads of desperately needed rations at Appomattox station. Lee and his men had finally come to the end of the road.

Grant and Lee met in the drawing room of a private home in the village of Appomattox Court House on the afternoon of 9 April. For a



**Farewell to arms** A depiction of Grant accepting Lee's surrender. From 1869, Grant served as US president

few minutes the two generals exchanged pleasantries. Then Lee brought them to the business at hand. Grant wrote out the surrender terms and Lee signed them. The two generals shook hands. Most Americans shared the assumption that the surrender of Lee's army signalled the effective end of the war, even though Jefferson Davis remained at large,

as did several other Confederate forces. Not until 2 June in Texas did General Edmund Kirby-Smith formally surrender the last of the major Confederate forces, but in reality Appomattox was the end. It marked not just the defeat of the South's four-year experiment in independence, but of freedom and republican government as they had understood it.

## 32 Lincoln's assassination, 1865

ON THE EVENING of 14 April 1865, Good Friday, President Lincoln and his wife Mary went to Ford's Theatre a few blocks from the White House to attend a benefit performance of a popular British comedy, *Our American Cousin*, raising money for the play's producer, who also performed in the show.

Well-known actor John Wilkes Booth, scion of a famous family of Shakespearean actors, entered the theatre by the stage door and made his way to the corridor outside the presidential box. A man of strong Confederate sympathies, Booth had cast himself in the role of avenging angel. Together with a coterie of peculiar friends, several of whom appear to have been mentally ill, Booth had hatched a vainglorious plot. The plan was originally to

kidnap Lincoln, bind and gag him, but after the fall of Richmond it was decided to assassinate the president instead.

Booth made his move at a quiet moment in the play. He fired a bullet into Lincoln's head at close range, then leapt from the box onto the stage. Before the audience grasped what they had witnessed, Booth fled, only to die when Federal troops caught up with him.

Lincoln did not die instantly. He was carried across the road to a room in a boarding house where he lay until the early hours of the next morning, never regaining consciousness. With Mary convulsed with grief and news of the assassination spreading rapidly by telegraph, Lincoln's cabinet colleagues gathered. They were present at his bedside when the



**Killing shot** After the assassination, John Wilkes Booth was hunted down and shot, in a blazing barn in Virginia

president drew his last breath, at 7.22am on 15 April. Edwin Stanton broke the silence with the words, "Now he belongs to the ages."

Lincoln's death allowed northerners to weep for all their dead. The slogans sewn on flags and black banners, "The memory of the just is blessed," ensured that Lincoln stood in for many other private losses.



# THE SACK OF THE SOUTH

When General Sherman marched 62,000 Union troops through the south in 1864, he left a 50-mile-wide path of destruction, says **Anne Sarah Rubin**, destroying the Confederacy's morale and ability to wage war

**W**HEN THE YANKEES came, Claiborne Moss was not even eight years old. He had been born a slave on Archie Duggins' plantation near Sandersville, Georgia, and there he watched as blue-coated Union soldiers swept through on what has become famous as Sherman's March. The soldiers "stole everything that they could lay their hands on – all the gold and silver that was in the house, and everything they could carry."

Sherman's troops wreak destruction on a Georgia plantation in 1864

Claiborne watched as a lost Yankee came back and asked for directions and then Moss's master "pointed the way with his left hand and while the fellow was looking that way, he drug him off his horse and cut his throat..."

In North Carolina, Elizabeth Collier sat helplessly as "a party of most desperate fellows" broke down the back door of her home in Everettsville, and then "commenced their sacking of the house and did not cease until they had taken

everything to eat the house contained... Curses and oaths were uttered on all sides – it was truly fearful." The Union soldiers tried to set the house on fire, ransacked trunks and bureaus, and stole valuables. Collier and her family had to leave their home and become refugees, with little more than the clothes on their backs.

General Sherman's March through Georgia and Carolina, bringing the war directly to the civilians of the south, took place from autumn 1864 to late





spring 1865. A few years later, Union General EF Noyes addressed a reunion of veterans, nostalgically recalling that "in this rollicking picnic expedition there was just enough of fighting for variety, enough of hardship to give zest to the repose which followed it, and enough of ludicrous adventure to make its memory a constant source of gratification."

An enslaved child; a southern white woman; a Union veteran. Each experienced Sherman's March, each lived to tell the tale, but their stories differ profoundly. What they share, however, is the experience of close contact between soldiers and civilians, an intimate warfare whose contours were directed from the top down.

### Capture of Atlanta

General Sherman's Union Army had captured the southern city of Atlanta in early September 1864. Soon after that he decided to evacuate the city's civilian population. He wanted the city, an important railway hub, to be a purely military base – he didn't want to deal with feeding or protecting civilians, or guarding his troops against guerrillas and spies.

When the mayor of Atlanta protested, Sherman simply explained that "war is cruelty and you cannot refine it." Some 1,600 whites and blacks were forced out of the city, onto the roads of Georgia.

Sherman did not want to permanently occupy Atlanta. He received permission to break free from his supply lines and march across Georgia to the coast to link up with the Union Navy. To that end, Sherman divided his 62,000-man army into two wings, each comprising two Corps: the Fifteenth and Seventeenth in the Right Wing, the Fourteenth and Twentieth in the Left Wing. Almost 5,000 cavalrymen under Judson Kilpatrick would weave back and forth. Thus Sherman's March actually proceeded in four columns, covering a distance of as many as 50 miles from edge to edge. The March didn't proceed like a lawnmower, cutting down everything in its path, but more like a reaper, destroying some areas and leaving others untouched.

Before setting out, Sherman tried to set some ground rules. His Special

Field Orders No. 120 ordered his men to "forage liberally on the country," and "to destroy mills, houses, cotton-gins, etc," but within limits. The foraging parties were supposed to be regularised and under the control of "discreet" officers; soldiers were not supposed to enter homes; should the army be left "unmolested", southern property was also supposed to be left alone.

Sherman also ordered that when livestock was being seized, his men ought to discriminate "between the rich, who are usually hostile, and the poor and industrious, usually neutral or friendly."

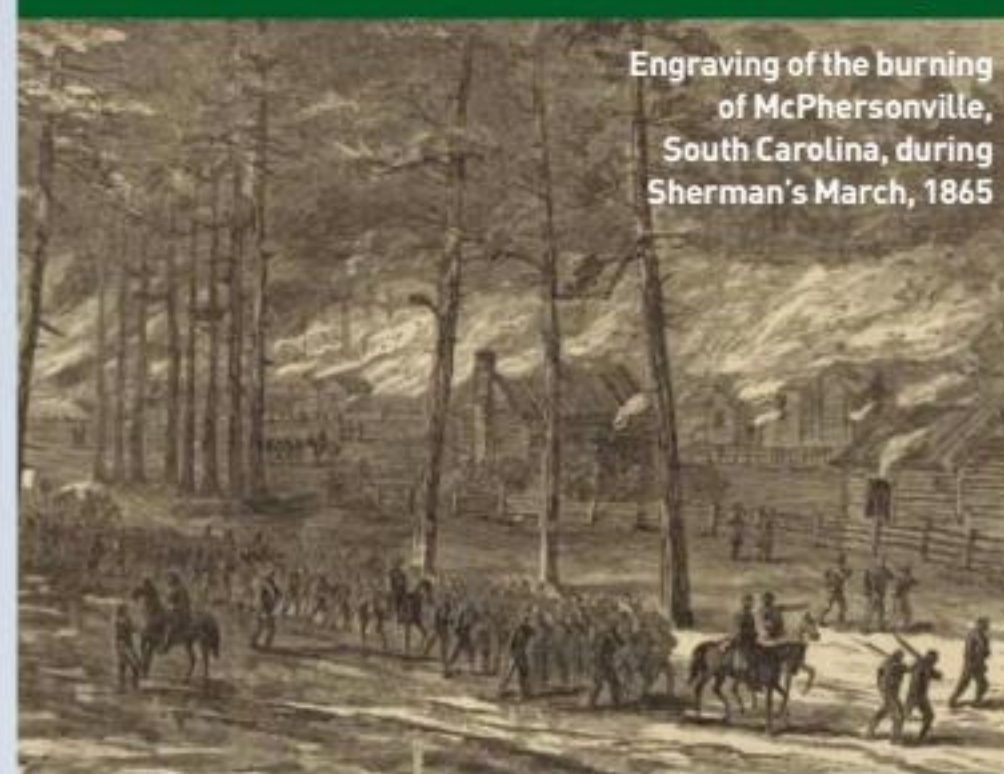
As for African-Americans, Sherman was willing to permit commanders to put able-bodied men who could "be of service" into pioneer corps, but urged them to be mindful of their limited supplies. In effect, he was telling his men to leave the newly-freed women and children behind. Most of these rules were honoured more in the breach than in reality, but their very existence gave Sherman (and to an arguably lesser extent his men) a degree of moral cover. They certainly allowed for a certain elasticity – harsher treatment of some people in some places, leniency elsewhere.

### Killing and looting

The marchers left Atlanta on 15 November, travelling about 10 miles a day – a leisurely pace for experienced veterans. They looted homes and churches, burned barns and cotton gins. They stole food, horses, silver and jewellery, and killed livestock and the dogs that had once been used to track runaway slaves.

William McCullough of Jones County remembered Union ➤

## Scorched earth morality



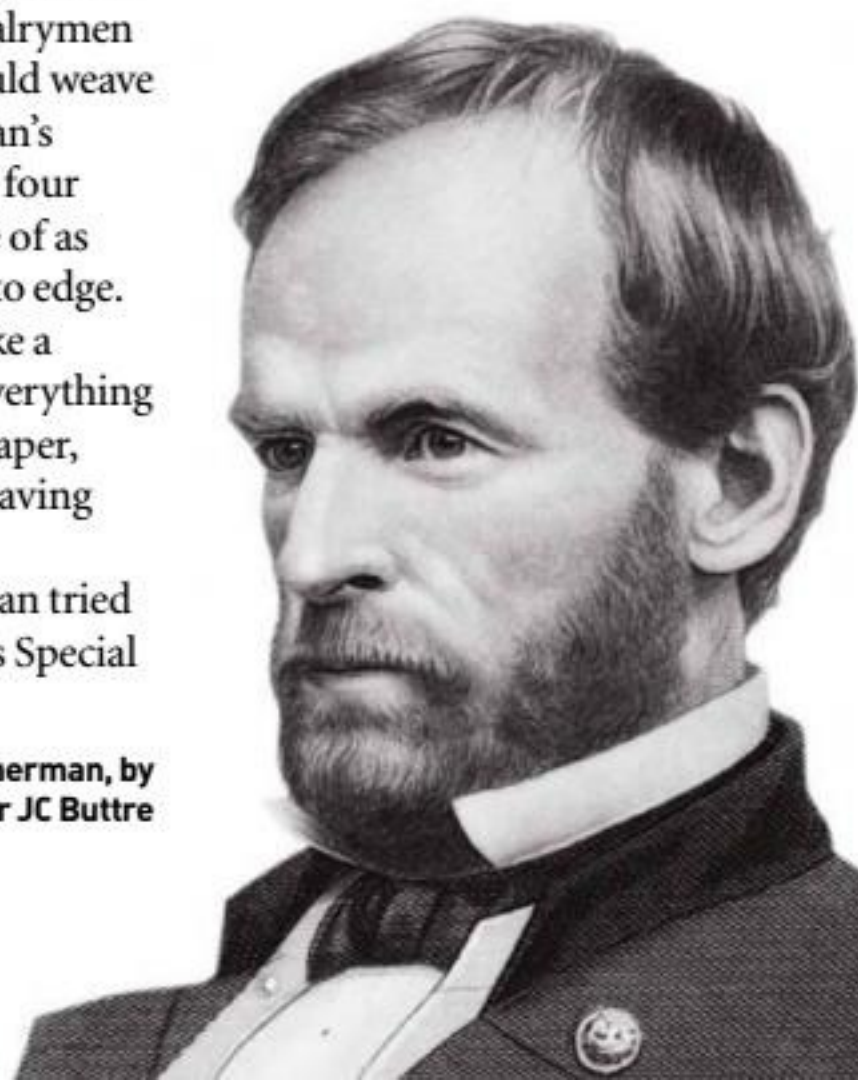
Engraving of the burning of McPhersonville, South Carolina, during Sherman's March, 1865

THE MORALITY AND legality of Sherman's March, with its targeting of civilian infrastructure and supplies, have been debated since it first set off. Today debate rages on civil war blogs and message boards on topics such as "was Sherman a war criminal?" There are accusations that he was the originator of 'total war.' In the 1980s, James Reston Jr argued that one could connect Sherman's March, via the direct targeting of civilians in the Second World War, to Vietnam-era atrocities including the My Lai massacre. Sherman is still described as a merchant of terror who cared nothing for the people whose homes and livelihoods he or his men destroyed.

The reality of this is more complicated. Sherman was not the first Union general to use 'hard war' tactics against southern civilians but he did so on a much larger, more public and arguably more unabashed scale. While there were no international laws of war in 1864, the Union army was governed by its own guidelines, known as the Lieber Code, which allowed for hostile civilians to be "subjected to the hardships of the war." At the same time, however, the code also prohibited "wanton violence" and unauthorised destruction. Sherman believed he was operating within the laws of war and parameters of so-called civilised behaviour. He never apologised for the March and, indeed, took pride in its role in bringing the war to a close.

As the 19th century became the 20th and as wars of increasing deadliness and destructive power broke out around the globe, the March seemed to reappear again and again. Often, the analogy was strained, but it revealed much about the common understanding of the March, or of a simplified version of it. German atrocities in Belgium in the First World War were compared to the March, as part of a debate over American neutrality in 1915. Perhaps because increasing American involvement in Vietnam coincided with the centennial of the American Civil War, the analogies between Sherman's March and Vietnam came thick and fast from the 1960s to 1980s. Sherman is often invoked in arguments about American tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan, sometimes approvingly, sometimes not. The legacy of Sherman's March continues.

General William Sherman, by 19th-century engraver JC Buttre





## SHERMAN'S MARCH

The Union army takes war to the south, 1864/65



### ① 15 November 1864

William T. Sherman and his 62,000-man army, split into two wings, march out of Atlanta heading for Savannah and the sea.

### ② 23 November 1864

The Left Wing of Sherman's forces takes Milledgeville, then capital of Georgia – the first of three state capitals they will take on their march through southern heartlands.

### ③ 27 November 1864

Soldiers find the abandoned remains of Camp Lawton, a Confederate prison, and the graves of hundreds of Union soldiers. They vent their anger on the town of Millen.

### ④ 9 December 1864

In an act of brutal cruelty, African-Americans following in the wake of Sherman's army are left to drown or be captured by Confederates at Ebenezer Creek.

### ⑤ 22 December 1864

Sherman and his army march into the city of Savannah, concluding the first phase of their campaign to take war to the south.

### 21 January 1865

Sherman and his men leave Savannah for South Carolina, determined to make the state pay for secession and for the firing on Fort Sumter that had sparked the war in 1861.

### ⑥ 17 February 1865

The city of Columbia, South Carolina, is engulfed in fire, sparking off a debate about whether it was set by Sherman's men or retreating Confederates.

### ⑦ 19–21 March 1865

Sherman's men face Confederates under General Joseph Johnston at the battle of Bentonville, North Carolina, the last battle of the campaign.

### ⑧ 26 April 1865

Johnston surrenders to Sherman at the Bennett Place, a farmhouse near Durham, North Carolina. It is the largest surrender of the civil war.

### 24 May 1865

Sherman's men march in the Grand Review in Washington, DC, accompanied by free blacks and some of the spoils of war, including cows and mules taken along the way.



Between towns, Sherman's men walked at the relatively gentle pace of 10 miles a day

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X2, MAP BY MARTIN SANDERS

➤ soldiers burning his home. He recalled that they left his family with only "the clothes we had on; no food and no place to sleep... for days we ate our corn left on the ground by the Yankees' horses."

Union soldiers faced few obstacles and fought just one battle in Georgia

– at Griswoldville, on 22 November, where they realised their opponents were young boys and old men. On the next day soldiers of the Left Wing took Milledgeville, Georgia's capital. Amid their flurry of destruction, some regiments took time out to hold a mock legislative session in the

statehouse, symbolically voting Georgia back into the Union.

Over the following week, troops converged on the small town of Millen in the hopes of liberating a Confederate prison. Camp Lawton had been hastily built to hold Union prisoners of war and was just as



hastily evacuated in advance of the March. When Sherman's men found the abandoned camp, along with 700 graves, they vented their anger in town, torching the railroad depot and hotel.

The soldiers reached the outskirts of Savannah on 10 December and found it defended by 10,000 Confederates. Sherman bypassed it temporarily, captured Fort McAllister and reopened his communication lines. Savannah surrendered rather than be subjected to bombardment. On 22 December, General Sherman telegraphed President Lincoln: "I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton."

### A trail of smoke

The journey from Atlanta to Savannah is known as Sherman's March to the Sea. But after spending January in Savannah, Sherman and his men continued, moving out of the city and into South Carolina. This phase of the March would differ from the earlier one in two significant ways. It would be much harder going, through dense swamps. It would also be even more destructive.

Sherman recalled, somewhat disingenuously, that "somehow our men had got the idea that South Carolina was the cause of all our troubles... and therefore on them should fall the scourge of war in its worst form... and I would not restrain the army lest its vigor and energy should be impaired." And so the men moved on, inexorably, leaving a trail of smoke and rubble behind them. Several towns in South Carolina, particularly those along the



Sherman's men destroyed many of the south's railroads, cutting off Confederate supplies and cutting down their hopes

## Sherman's troops stole food and horses and killed the dogs that had been used to track runaway slaves

railroad, were left in ruins during the first two weeks of February. In Barnwell, cavalrymen held a party with newly-freed slaves in the hotel as the town burned, quipping that the town should be called "Burnwell."

They arrived in the state capital of Columbia on 17 February 1865. Sherman and his men have long been charged with burning the city, but some conflicting evidence suggests that it was Confederates torching cotton that sparked the conflagration.

From Columbia, Union troops headed north into North Carolina,

a state to which they were more favourably disposed. Men who claimed to have taken the gloves off in South Carolina put them back on, in the hopes of not antagonising Unionists. They crossed the state, fighting Confederates at Averasboro and Bentonville, stopping in Fayetteville and Goldsboro. The March ended with the surrender of Joseph Johnston's Confederate army on 26 April 1865 at Bennett Place, a farmhouse near Durham.

### The end of the road

The March destroyed Southern morale and the Confederacy's ability to wage war. It also freed many thousands of African-Americans from the shackles of slavery, even though Sherman himself was not an advocate for black equality. In addition, Sherman supported a "soft peace," one with generous terms. In the years after the war he supported the idea of white southerners regaining political control, often at the expense of African-Americans.

It is almost impossible to calculate how much damage the March caused. Some estimates put the cost at about \$100 million. While it may be difficult to count the human and monetary cost, the scope and drama of Sherman's March has granted it a symbolic power that continues to fascinate students of the civil war. **H**

**Anne Sarah Rubin** is associate professor at the University of Maryland. Her book, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman's March and America*, comes out in 2014



Union forces take ammunition from the captured Fort McAllister before advancing to Savannah





# A BATTLE OF WILLS: WHY THE SOUTH LOST

In the end, the Confederate army was simply overwhelmed by larger forces, claimed General Lee. But that's not the whole story, as **Adam IP Smith** argues

**W**ITH HIS CONFEDERATE army outnumbered and exhausted, General Robert E Lee finally surrendered to General Grant. Four years of bitter civil war came to an end in the village of Appomattox, Virginia, on 9 April 1865. Lee offered a succinct explanation for why the South had lost: "The Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources."

In the years after the civil war, white southerners followed Lee's cue, telling an emotionally powerful story of a heroic and noble struggle against overwhelming odds. If Lee was right, historians need not look south of the Mason-Dixon line to explain the war's outcome: the answer is simply the old story of the biggest battalions winning. That was certainly how things looked in the bitter final year of the war, when Union armies vastly outnumbered and outgunned ragbag Confederate forces.

## Confederate strengths

But Lee's explanation is too simple. After all, when the war broke out, most seasoned military observers in Europe gave the Union, a government with a tiny standing army, scant chance of militarily subduing the Confederacy, a territory the size of the whole of western Europe. Like their Revolution-era forebears, the Confederates could have won against superior forces because they had compensating advantages: a resilient population, talented military leaders, the advantage of fighting a defensive war in country they knew and, above all, a cause for which most white southerners were prepared to make great sacrifices.

George W Randolph, a Confederate general, expressed a common view in the south when he predicted in 1861 that: "They

[the Federates] may overrun our frontier states and plunder our coast, but, as for conquering us, the thing is an impossibility... History offers no instance of a people as numerous as we are, inhabiting a country so extensive as ours, being subjected if true to ourselves."

If Randolph was right (and Lee was wrong), then the causes of Confederate defeat were internal rather than external. One set of possible internal explanations focuses on political divisions. According to this view, the Confederacy was hindered because its devotion to decentralised government, endless checks on executive power and obsession with individual liberty (for whites) undermined the capacity to fight. Perhaps, in the striking phrase of the

## Military observers gave the Union scant chance of subduing the Confederacy

late historian David Donald, the South "died of democracy". Yet what is striking about the Confederacy is how much power the government in Richmond had, taking control of munitions manufacturing, and impounding property. From nothing, the South created what was for a while one of the most effective and disciplined armies the world had seen.

Perhaps, then, the underlying failure of the Confederacy can be found in fault lines in southern society. Did class tensions undermine the war effort? Were women on the home front insufficiently committed to the cause? In fact, only in the final months of conflict did a failure of morale tangibly affect the ability of Confederate armies to resist. This was a tough society.

The most convincing 'internal' factor behind southern defeat was the very

institution that prompted secession: slavery. Enslaved people fled to join the Union army, depriving the South of labour and strengthening the North by more than 100,000 soldiers. Even so, slavery was not in itself the cause of defeat. In the end, slavery was destroyed because the North won, rather than the other way around.

If weaknesses in southern society don't in themselves explain Confederate defeat, does that return us to Lee's explanation at Appomattox? In a sense it does, but with a crucial caveat: so long as the North remained determined to crush the rebellion by force, it was always likely that its superiority in manpower and resources would tell in the end. But the North had to be prepared to pay the high price of victory.

## Morale dimension

The Confederates certainly understood this. The only way the South could win the war was for the North to give up.

And so, from the outset, the driving purpose of the military strategy of the South was to undermine northern morale – not just in its armies, but on the home front. That was one reason for Lee's 'invasions' of northern soil in 1862 and 1863. It was also why Lincoln's re-election was so important, because it represented a continued willingness to fight on the part of the Union.

In the end, perhaps the truth is that the North won the war because the idea of maintaining the Union was powerful enough to overcome setbacks. The North could very well have lost, but only if it had lost the will to win, and despite occasional wavering, it never did. **H**

**Adam IP Smith** is a senior lecturer in history at University College London and author of *The American Civil War* (Palgrave, 2007)





Robert E Lee (seated at the table, left) surrenders to Union commander Ulysses S Grant at Appomattox Court House

BT 111 (LINE DINS) Tr  
1897-





# THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

## LIFE FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

When the civil war began, escaping slaves fled to Union lines. But as **Jim Downs** explains, for many their lives continued to be difficult, blighted by racism, violence, hunger, economic insecurity and disease

**H**ER NAME WAS Lethy and she lived on a plantation in south-western Georgia. She was born into slavery in the second or third decade of the 19th century. Before the civil war, she gave birth to a son, Henry, in 1856, but her pregnancy involved complications, leading her 'owner' to describe her as "infirm from womb disease", an unclear medical diagnosis.

We know about Lethy because her former slaveholder initiated an employment contract with her on 1 July 1865. The contract symbolised one of the war's most dramatic consequences: the collapse of slavery and the creation of a new form of economic relations. While the Georgia planter enslaved her before the war, he noted in the contract that the United States government decreed Lethy as "a freedwoman" and thereby he needed to enter a contract negotiation with her.

The contract stipulated that Lethy would work in the "potato patches, garden and to work about the yard generally". In exchange for her labour, the planter agreed to pay Lethy five dollars a month as well as provide "food, fuel, and quarters" for her and for her son, Henry. According to the contract,

### Southern law prohibited enslaved people from learning to read and write

Lethy had to agree to pay for both her clothing and that of Henry.

The contract also included a clause in which Lethy had to agree to remain under her former owner's employ until December 1865 and if she should quit, "fail to faithfully perform" or "become insolent or feign sickness for the purpose of idleness", that she would "forfeit all wages that may be

due her by said laborer for labor already performed". Although the former slaveholder acknowledged that Lethy suffered from "womb disease", he nevertheless devised a clause about "feigning illness" that would inhibit her from declaring herself as sick since such an articulation would invariably lead to her termination as well as a forfeiting of her earnings.

The contract did, however, make a reference to doctor's bills that stipulated that Lethy would be responsible to pay for "cases of protracted illness" and the former owner would be responsible for "cases of incidental sickness". It remains unclear how the plantation owner determined what constituted "protracted" or "incidental" sickness as well as what defined "feigning illness" or being legitimately sick.

As a mother of a nine-year-old son, for whom she had to provide food, clothing and shelter, Lethy had little choice other



than to accept the problematic terms of the contract. Like many post-war contracts negotiated between formerly enslaved people and plantation owners, Lethy signed the contract by marking an 'X' above her name. Since antebellum southern law prohibited enslaved people from learning how to read and write, many could not sign their name on the new contracts that developed during the post-war period.

The end of the civil war provided Lethy with freedom, but power remained in the hands of the white master who once enslaved her. Or did it?

After slavery ended, early 20th-century American historians decried, similar to proslavery advocates a century earlier, freedpeople's ability to lead autonomous, productive lives without white supervision. They interpreted examples like Lethy's

contract as evidence of African-Americans' persistent dependence on white southerners. These historians further argued that formerly enslaved people should have returned to the plantation south in order to become a dependent black labour class, an echo of proslavery rhetoric.

### New perspectives

In the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the civil rights movement, a generation of historians shattered these interpretations, claiming African-Americans were principal actors in the rebuilding of the nation. They interpreted contracts, like the one brokered between Lethy and her former 'owner', as illustrations of former slaves' agency – their ability to negotiate terms of employment.

Marking an 'X' by her name, for example, signaled Lethy's newly won freedom and the

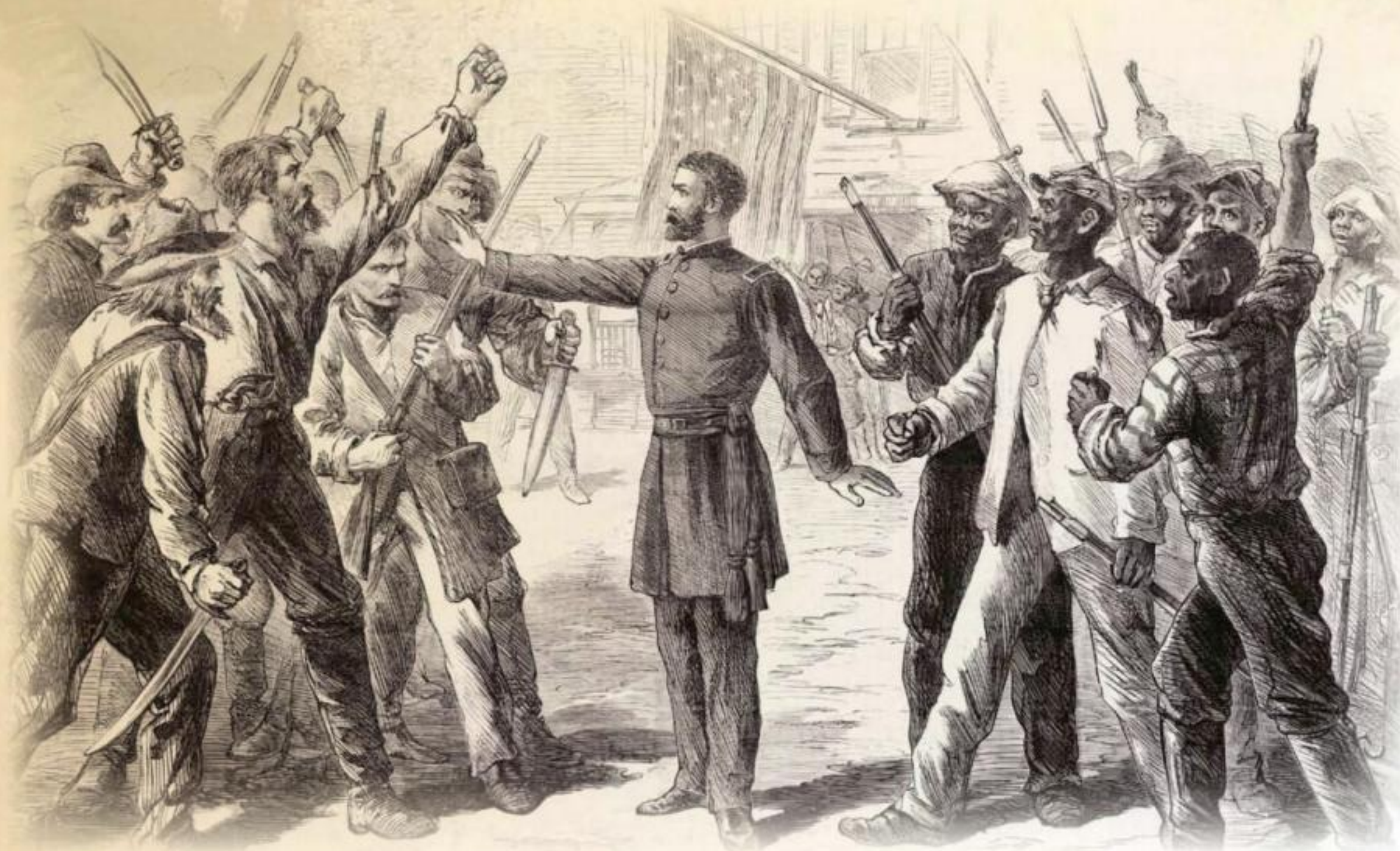
extent to which she participated in the creation of a new labour arrangement. While Lethy's voice remains absent in the contract itself, many historians of this generation would nevertheless uncover her imprint on it, arguing that Lethy had a say in its terms. They would turn to the clause that made a distinction about the payment of doctors' bills. Given that Lethy agreed to be responsible for doctor's bills in "cases of protracted illness" but the former owner agreed to pay for "incidental sickness" could suggest that Lethy shifted some of the burden of the medical fees to her owner, even if it was not entirely in her favour.

While the first generation of historians of emancipation claimed that African-Americans were dependent and inferior, the second generation claimed the opposite, uncovering glimmers of indefatigable ➤



Union soldiers in the Army of the Potomac, including one African-American recruit, take a meal break





A cartoon from 1868 shows General Oliver O Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau set up to support ex-slaves, mediating between groups of whites and blacks

➤ independence and strategic brilliance. But instead of framing Lethy's experience and that of the other four million enslaved people who became free during the civil war in the context of agency, let us instead examine this transformation in the context of the destruction, violence and disease the war produced, in an effort better to understand freedpeople's lives.

### Heading north

When the civil war first began, enslaved people throughout the plantation south began to escape from slavery by running to Union lines for refuge. During the course of the war, an estimated 500,000 former enslaved people fled to camps located in Kentucky, Mississippi, New Orleans, Tennessee and Virginia. Built out of used army tents and worn materials, these makeshift camps provided a safe harbour from former slaveholders and Confederate guerillas, but that was about it. The military did not anticipate that the war would lead to immediate emancipation. As a result, Union military officials lacked the food, clothing and other resources to provide for the newly freed who ran to Union regiments for assistance.

Meanwhile, by the late summer of 1862, the Union army had become beleaguered, and lost many soldiers because of a

combination of battle, disease and desertion. The military needed to increase its might and manpower, and slowly began to turn to the population of enslaved people who fled to their lines as a way to buttress the ranks. On 1 January 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that legally freed slaves in the Confederate states in an effort to support the Union cause.

## Union officials lacked food, clothing and resources to provide for the newly freed

Lincoln's call for emancipation resulted not from a moral opposition to slavery but rather stemmed from a military strategy to win the war. Further, the Proclamation only applied to the southern states that rebelled against the federal government; slavery remained intact in the so-called border states (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri), which officially remained aligned to neither the northern or southern cause. Lincoln feared that if he included the border states in his Proclamation, that they would join forces with the Confederacy.

Given the roots of the Emancipation Proclamation, there was never a concern

for formerly enslaved people's conditions, nor were there guidelines for how emancipation would unfold. Consequently emancipation erupted chaotically, and the military and government were mostly interested in the labour power that former slaves could contribute to the Union cause. The army forced freedmen to dig ditches, fortify garrisons, rebuild broken bridges and bury dead bodies. Enlistment only extended to a portion of formerly enslaved men, fewer than 135,000. The Army paid those men less than white troops and compelled them to endure the racist attitudes of white commanding officers.

For freedwomen, the conditions were much worse. A relatively few were lucky to gain employment as washerwomen, cooks and servants, in exchange for rations and shelter in Union camps; while the overwhelming majority were left with no opportunity to earn rations, and thereby starved, suffered and became sick.

### Illness strikes

Disease was a constant problem in the civil war. Indeed, more soldiers died during the war from disease than from battle. This made life particularly precarious for former slaves who lacked the basic necessities to survive. Beginning as early as 1861,



a smallpox epidemic broke out in Washington, DC. It spread to the upper south in 1863 and to the lower south in 1866 – where it claimed the lives of more than 60,000 freedpeople. Although the medical community had recognised vaccination as a way to ward off the virus since the turn of the 19th century, officials failed to extend these basic measures to the population of the newly freed. Further, many argued, as a journalist for the *New York Times* did in 1866, that: “Small-pox rages among them... dirt, debauchery, idleness, are the cases of this inordinate mortality.” Both the northern press and the federal authorities failed to consider that the epidemic reached “inordinate mortality” because freed slaves were forced to live in unsanitary camps, where they lacked access to vaccination and even the ability to quarantine those infected.

Compounding matters, while the Union army represented protection for formerly enslaved women, life among soldiers proved dangerous. In January 1864 in a Union camp in New Orleans, soldiers snuck into the ‘quarters’ of freedwomen, climbed into their beds, and raped one woman and sexually assaulted three others. The full details of the episode remain unclear, but incidents like these proliferated throughout the war and its aftermath. A number of

historians are beginning to unearth references to the rape of formerly enslaved women in federal records, court cases and personal correspondence. The shocking details of these crimes lies in the chilling irony that northern men, who came in the name of freedom to the south, actually perpetrated crimes against the women they were meant to liberate and to protect.

The utter violence combined with the explosive outbreak of epidemics that

## Freed slaves in camps lacked even the ability to quarantine those infected with disease

freedpeople endured during the civil war might provide a better context to understand Lethy’s employment contract. For Lethy, to leave the plantation would have meant entering into a world where she and her son could become fatally sick or starve to death. Given that Lethy had already suffered from some type of illness, this may have influenced her decision to enter into a negotiation with her former owner rather than venture out on her own. Additionally, since many enslaved people who liberated themselves from the plantation south lived in a kind of limbo without shelter, food,

and clothing during and after the war, negotiating a contract with her former owner provided Lethy with the basic necessities to survive, which many of her contemporaries lacked.

### Crimes against women

The violence that freedwomen endured in Union camps – namely the threat of sexual assault and racism – was likely not something from which Lethy could claim exception. The government forced Lethy’s planter to recognise her as a freedwoman, no longer as his ‘property’. However, the government could not legislate the daily, tense interactions between a former master and a formerly enslaved woman.

How they interacted, how they spoke to each and how they understood each other did not change immediately because of a contract or even a law that redefined their relationship.

Yet something quite revolutionary did happen. Lethy was indeed free. She could break the contract, even if it meant she would not be paid. But perhaps we should see this as the price of freedom. **H**

**Jim Downs** is the author of *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2012)



Growing rice, work often undertaken by African-Americans, was hugely physically demanding



A group of freed slaves poses in Richmond, Virginia in 1865, the year the capital of the Confederacy fell to Union forces ahead of the civil war ending



An image of ‘contrabands’ – escaped slaves – taken during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862





The idyllic welcome home was shortlived for many veterans – the war had deep-rooted effects on their bodies and minds

# HELP FOR HEROES

Many soldiers returned from the civil war to face hardship, especially those on the losing side, who didn't get government aid, writes **Susan-Mary Grant**

**J**OHN SITGREAVES GREEN from South Carolina harboured no particular ambitions to be a soldier. The former treasurer of South Carolina College, and later the archivist in charge of the preservation of the state's colonial and revolutionary records, he was a man more at home among books than on battlefields. Yet when the civil war broke out, Green, possibly inspired by his state's revolutionary heritage, with which he was so familiar, was quick to volunteer his services. He remained in the Confederate army until 1865.

However, he did not escape the war unscathed. Having sustained a "sabre-cut of excruciating, continued agony", Green became addicted to the opium he was prescribed as pain relief for his wound. Nevertheless, at first he appeared to settle back into civilian life and even served as a district judge.

It was not long before both Green's health and mind began to deteriorate. Although eventually weaned off opium at St Luke's

Hospital in New York, he began to experience sleeplessness and bouts of "raving". He turned to alcohol as a form of self-medication but this only made his condition worse. By 1877, his family had endured enough. When Green seized the stage in order to read out some poetry at a public 'Penny Reading' event, organised to raise funds for a Confederate monument, the "great scandal"

**The fixed rate for missing body parts was six dollars for a big toe, or 12 for an eye**

caused by his behaviour prompted his family to commit him to the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, where he died four years later.

Green was hardly the only inmate of the South Carolina asylum whose path to its door began on the battlefields of the civil war. Nor was he the only one for whom physical damage, perhaps through the pain it caused, proved the precursor to

persistent psychological problems. In 1868, Oscar D Jones, a former private in the Second Florida Cavalry, was admitted to the asylum. He too had suffered devastating physical injury. Jones was shot through the hip and temporarily paralysed, his physicians later concluding that it was from this that his "hopeless insanity" stemmed.

## Physical wounds

Although both Green and Jones apparently recovered from their physical wounds, it was the lasting psychological damage they sustained that wrecked their lives. For many other soldiers, although their symptoms were not perhaps so severe, the war still left its mark. In the most extreme cases, this consisted of the loss of a limb that compromised the veteran's return to civilian life. In a nation where only 20 per cent of the population lived in an urban environment and more than 50 per cent of workers were employed in an agricultural capacity, that life was likely to have involved hard physical labour.



In recognition of this fact, the Union provided both pensions and prosthetic limbs for its wounded soldiers. Prosthetics, indeed, proved a lucrative business for those who recognised the demand and set out to meet it. And with some 30,000 amputations performed on Union soldiers alone, demand was high. There were a similar number in the Confederacy. In total, around 10 per cent of all the wounded who survived were amputees. Between the start of the war and 1873, some 150 patents for prosthetic devices were issued, an increase of around 300 per cent over the previous decade.

### Southern support

The federal government did not provide prosthetics for Confederate veterans, who had to rely on private charity in the form of the Association for the Relief of Maimed Soldiers (ARMS) or on their financially devastated states for support. Most former Confederate states did manage to offer some aid, recognising, as North Carolina did, the need to provide amputees with artificial limbs “and thus to restore them, as far as is practicable, to the comfortable use of their persons, to the enjoyment of life and to the ability to earn a subsistence”.

Pensions were, though, beyond the ability of the former Confederacy at first, resulting in widespread hardship in the immediate post-war period. Union wounded veterans by contrast could receive on average about 30 per cent of a labourer’s income in the form of a pension. The amount varied depending on the nature and extent of the disability suffered. By 1873, this was worked

out via a fixed rate for missing body parts – six dollars for a big toe, for example, or 12 dollars for the loss of an eye. The veteran had to prove that his disability had been incurred in the course of the conflict. This resulted in the development of an extensive bureaucracy of benevolence in the north, comprising lawyers, administrators, physicians, clerks, neighbours and former comrades, all geared toward validating claims before the Pension Bureau decided on the amount payable. But despite disability benefits, the economic outlook for many veterans was bleak.

This was not what most soldiers had envisaged at the end of the war

## Pension payments alone accounted for about 40 per cent of the federal budget

when, welcomed home as heroes, they marched through Washington in May 1865 under banners announcing that: “The Only National Debt We Can Never Pay is the Debt We Owe to the Victorious Union Soldiers.” Such enthusiasm soon faded. Only two weeks later the *New York Times* criticised the lack of enthusiasm “exhibited by the people for whom these noble men have done so much”. Before the year’s end, the *New York Tribune* published a letter from a Union veteran bemoaning the sight of “thousands of maimed soldiers” on the city’s streets. “What attention is paid to them?” he asked, “None whatever.” Two years later, the *Times* returned to the theme of the persistent “decline of popular interest in the heroes who wrought out our



Union infantryman William Sargent lost both arms in the civil war

triumph... The crutch of the crippled soldier may stand us in stead of a coronet, to betoken where admiration and respect are due.”

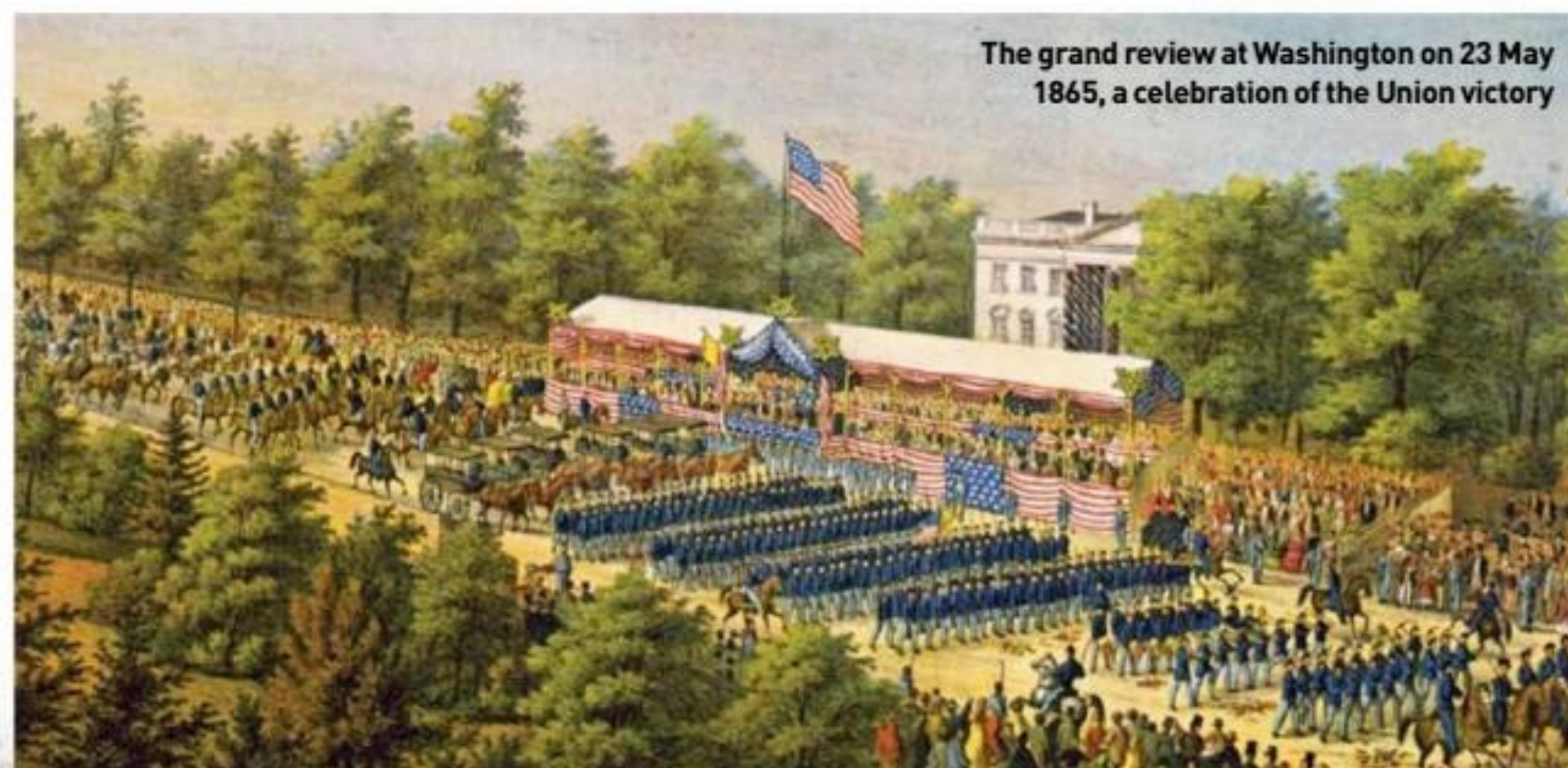
Public sympathy proved then, as now, fickle in its fidelity to those who had fought. As the price of pensions and prosthetics rose, the civil war veteran was increasingly regarded as a fiscal liability, a drain on the state. From three per cent in 1866, by the turn of the century pension payments alone accounted for about 40 per cent of the federal budget.

### Contemporary resonance

The civil war soldier’s experiences established the groundwork upon which an entire veterans’ benefits administration would be constructed in the USA following the wars of the 20th century. But much of the suspicion and mistrust that pursued the civil war soldier into the civilian world lay between the lines of the pension paperwork and behind the public pride expressed at parades.

Today, we enthuse over the sophisticated prosthetics available for wounded soldiers and we better understand the psychological wounds of conflict, but both modern and civil war soldiers would agree on one simple truth: “The grind of battle wears on the toughest of men,” as one Iraqi veteran put it and, as John Sitgreaves Green’s family found, too often follows the soldier home. **H**

**Susan-Mary Grant** is professor of American history at Newcastle University and author of *The War for a Nation: the American Civil War* (Routledge, 2006)



The grand review at Washington on 23 May 1865, a celebration of the Union victory



# THE RECONSTRUCTION OF AMERICA

## AFTER THE WAR

The civil war determined, once and for all, that America was one nation, indivisible. But it did not determine what kind of a nation it would be, says **Heather Cox Richardson**. Somehow, Americans had to construct a new country out of the bitterly divided states

**T**WO NEW FACTORS would determine the shape of postwar America. Firstly, the war had revolutionised the idea of American citizenship. Before the war, Americans had looked to educated, propertied white men to govern. But in the south, those were the very men who had set out to destroy the Union. Meanwhile, people excluded from government had rallied around it. Uneducated and impoverished African-Americans had thrown themselves behind the Union: black soldiers died at a rate 40 per cent

higher than white troops. Women had spent the war years tending fields, buying bonds, giving sons to the war and supporting the president. New immigrants had rushed to the Union, struggling on battlefields and in wheatfields to produce cash crops that brought gold to the treasury. Now, African-Americans, women and immigrants wanted their say.

Secondly, the issue of which voices would be welcome in postwar government had huge importance because during the war, Congress had changed the country's financial system. To meet the needs of the

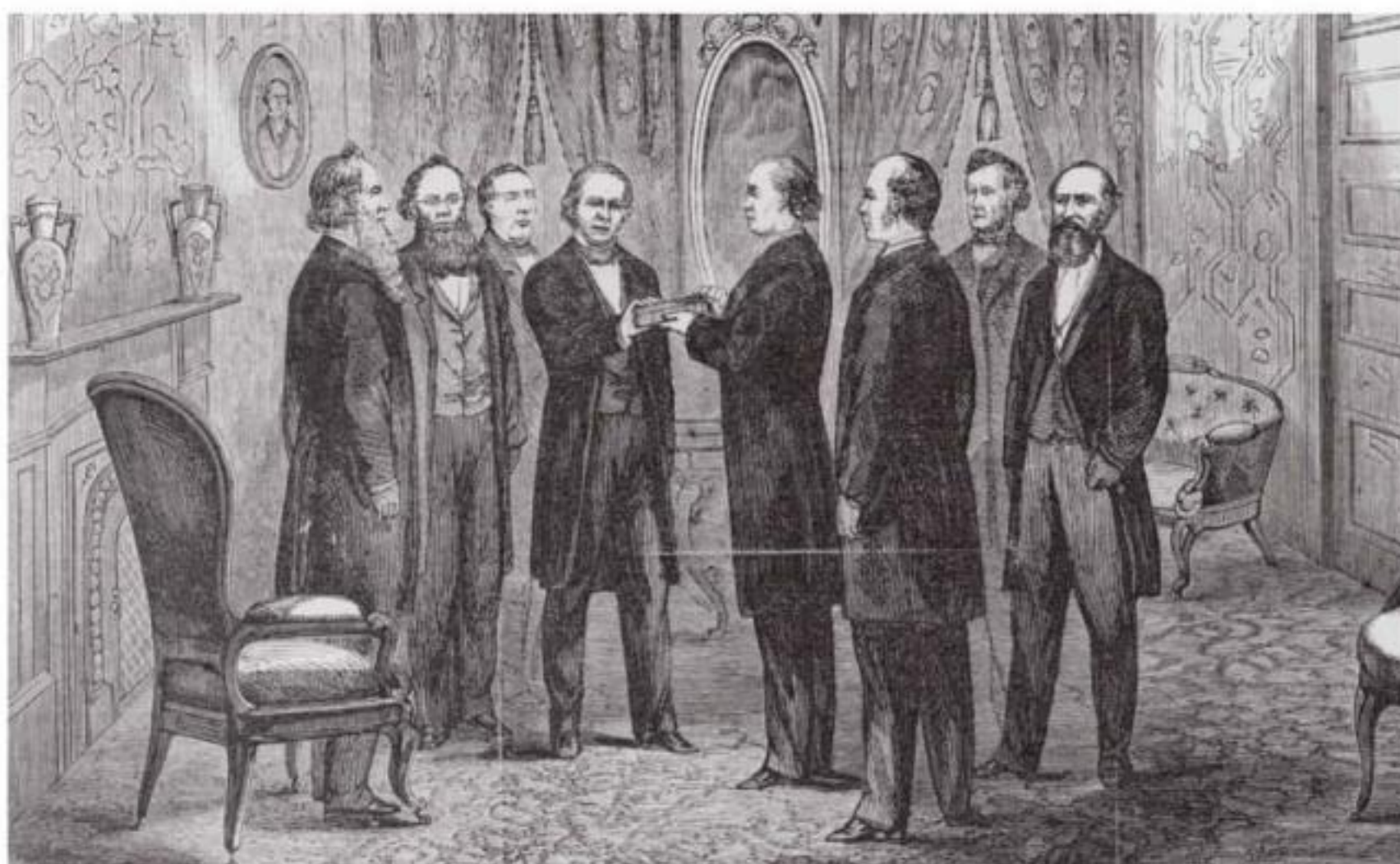
treasury, Congress had introduced a new measure: national taxes. For the first time in American history, voting would have a direct impact on how other people's money was spent. These two factors would determine the course of reconstruction.

### Recreating the status quo

Congress adjourned in early March 1865 and would not reconvene until early December. After Lincoln's death in April, vice president Andrew Johnson became US President and had nine months without oversight to "restore" the nation. A border state Democrat, Johnson wanted to recreate the antebellum status quo, without slavery. Democrats would, he believed, rally to him and retake the country, running it much as they had before the civil war. There would be no new voices and, once he restored the Union and gutted the government's wartime apparatus, no national taxes.

He began his term by pardoning all but about 1,500 former Confederates. To gain readmission to the Union, he demanded only that southern legislatures abolish slavery, nullify ordinances of secession and repudiate the Confederate debt (which meant southern states could not repay citizens who had bought state bonds to finance the war effort).

Southern legislatures did as he asked. Then they reflected the spirit of Johnson's plan by circumscribing



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS X2, ALAMY

Andrew Johnson – shown here taking the oath as president after Lincoln's assassination – led the reconstruction





This racist poster from 1866 attacks republicans on black suffrage. It depicts a black man as idle, with whites forced to toil in the fields

the lives of freed people. 'Black Codes' bound black workers to white employers, restricted their movements, and kept African-Americans from owning property or testifying in court. Southerners then re-elected to Congress a raft of ex-Confederates, including Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the Confederacy. Under Johnson's policies, the postwar south looked much like the antebellum south.

In December 1865, Johnson greeted the new Congress with the cheery news that reconstruction was over. All Congress now had to do was seat the newly elected southern representatives, disband the military and slash the federal budget back to antebellum levels. With the exception of slavery, America would be just as it was before the war.

### Mississippi frog-pond

Republican congressmen, however, utterly rejected Johnson's version of reconstruction. Northern soldiers had died in bloody piles at Antietam, rotted from infections in dirty hospitals and starved at Andersonville, while their kinfolk sweated in fields and factories to support the war. Finally victorious, northerners had watched, horrified, as ex-Confederates retook control of the south and virtually re-enslaved the black southerners who had been loyal to the Union.

The *Chicago Tribune* snarled in December 1865: "The men of the North will convert the State of Mississippi into a frog-pond before they will allow [the Black Codes] to disgrace one foot of soil in which the bones of our soldiers sleep and over which the flag of freedom waves."

## Northerners had watched, horrified, as ex-Confederates virtually re-enslaved the black southerners

the rights of all loyal Americans to equal protection under the laws. On the other, Democrats complained that Republicans were using tax dollars to help black Americans at the expense of hardworking white men.

Republicans were not necessarily keen advocates of black voting, but Johnson's pardon of most white southern Democrats made them turn to black suffrage to keep the government out of the hands of ex-Confederates. Congressmen's

Congressional Republicans refused to seat southern representatives, then granted black southerners the right to own property and to bring suits and testify in court. They also established federal courts in the south to give ex-slaves access to legal protection.

Johnson vetoed these laws, arguing both that they gave black men more legal rights than white men and that the officials necessary to protect black rights would waste tax dollars. Then he announced Congress was operating illegally because it was passing laws without southern representatives. It could not legislate, he said, until it restored the south to the Union. Congress promptly repassed its laws over his veto.

The battle lines were drawn. On the one hand, Republicans defended

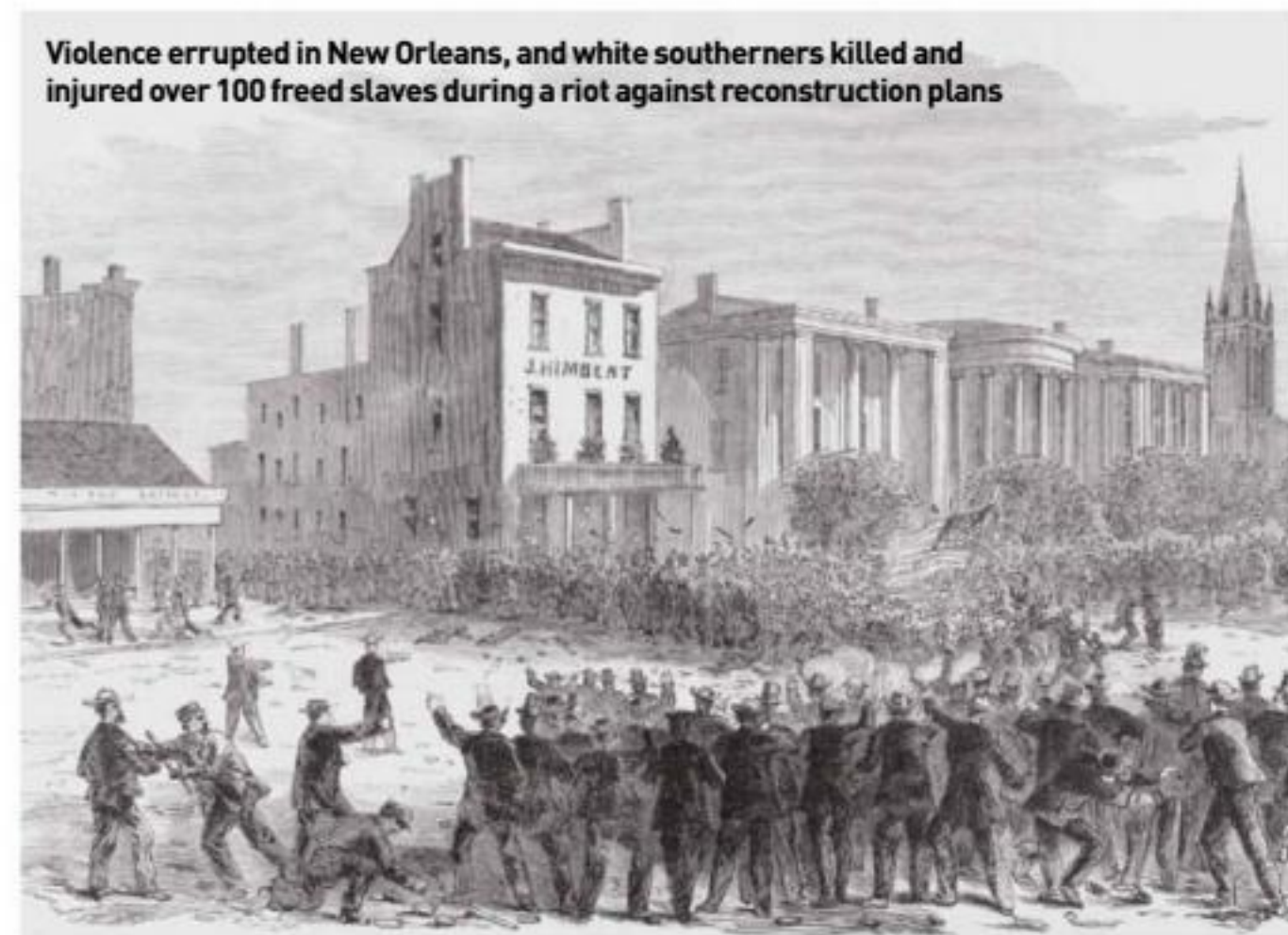
solution to the problem of reintegrating the southern states to the Union was the Fourteenth Amendment. This constitutional amendment expanded citizenship to African-American men as well as the children of all immigrants. It also tried to nudge the south toward black suffrage by threatening to reduce a state's congressional representation if it denied the vote to a significant number of its men. Congress called for southern states to ratify the amendment before readmission to the Union.

### Continued rebellion

In summer 1866, Johnson railed against congressmen as "traitors... trying to break up the Government". Convinced Democrats would sweep the 1866 midterm elections and that a new Democratic Congress would endorse his own policies, he urged southern whites to ignore Republicans' reconstruction plan.

In Memphis and New Orleans, white southerners rioted, killing or wounding more than 100 African-Americans and destroying hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property. Aghast at the South's continuing rebellion, northerners repudiated Johnson and gave Republicans a two-thirds majority in Congress.

Since southern whites had ignored the Fourteenth Amendment, congressmen passed the landmark Military Reconstruction Act in March 1867. This law divided the ten unreconstructed southern states into five military districts and ➤



Violence erupted in New Orleans, and white southerners killed and injured over 100 freed slaves during a riot against reconstruction plans





For many, reconstruction was a patriotic and religious journey, as can be seen in this allegorical picture from 1867

➤ required southern states to rewrite their constitutions. In a revolutionary change to American government, it permitted black men to vote for the delegates to those constitutional conventions. When southern whites opted for military occupation rather than registering black voters, Congress put the military in charge of the process.

Newly registered southern voters elected officials who wrote new state constitutions establishing black suffrage. Desperate to prevent the ratification of those constitutions, southern Democrats donned sheets designed to look like the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers, and terrorised Republican voters before the 1868 election. In the months before voters went to the polls, these

## Democrats donned sheets to look like the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers, and terrorised Republican voters

Ku Klux Klan members murdered about a thousand people.

Their campaign of terror failed. Voters accepted the new constitutions and the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1868, Congress readmitted southern states to the Union. Briefly, it seemed, a reconstructed government would include all loyal men.

But reconstruction was not over. After readmission, the Georgia legislature expelled its black legislators. Congress promptly



Despite avid campaigning, women were denied a voice in the 14th amendment

refused to seat the state's representatives, thus remanding Georgia to military rule. Then it passed the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ensuring a citizen's right to vote could not be restricted by race and required Georgia to ratify the amendment. It did so and on 15 July 1870 Congress readmitted Georgia to the Union, formally ending reconstruction.

## Shutting out women

But the reconstruction of a new nation was still not over. White women refused to give up their seat at the national table when black men had taken theirs. "The civil war came to an end, leaving the slave not only emancipated, but endowed with the full dignity of citizenship," Boston reformer Julia Ward Howe recalled. "The women of the North had greatly helped to open the door which admitted him to freedom and its safeguard, the ballot. Was this door to be shut in their face?"

In 1869, after being excluded from the Fourteenth Amendment, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony organised the National Woman Suffrage Association, demanding a variety of reforms. Months later, Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe organised

## Timeline

## Key events in creating a new country after the civil war

**1865**

### Black Codes

Southern legislature tries to force freed people into quasi-slavery

**1866**

### Memphis and New Orleans Riots

Bloody race riots convince northerners to abandon Johnson's postwar reconstruction policies

**1867**

### The Military Reconstruction Act

Congress divides ten southern states into five military districts, overseen by army officers

**1868**

### 14th Amendment

Congressmen base reconstruction on changing the Constitution to establish equal rights for all men



the American Woman Suffrage Association, seeking only the vote in the belief that from suffrage all other women's rights would flow. Excluded the following year from the Fifteenth Amendment, women staged a 'vote in' during the presidential election of 1872 to claim their citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. When the registrar turned a suffragist away from the polls, her challenge began to work its way to the Supreme Court.

By 1872, though, northerners had begun to retreat from the idea that every American should have a say in the postwar nation. The rise of organised labour brought home southern Democrats' complaints that an activist government would tax the wealthy to benefit poor workers. In 1866, America's first National Labour Union met to call for an eight-hour working day, higher wages and better working conditions.

Wealthy northerners began to worry that southerners were right: the voice of workers in government would lead to a redistribution of wealth through taxation or pro-labour legislation. With the eruption of the Paris Commune in spring 1871, they were sure of it.

Pointing to the "recent terrible Communistic outbreak in Paris," one reformer wrote: "In the judgment of one who has been familiar with our 'dangerous classes' for 20 years, there are just the same explosive social elements beneath the surface of New York as of Paris."

The coincidence of black voting and rising numbers of immigrant workers convinced wealthy Americans that the expansion of the body politic invited communism. They worried that black field workers and urban labourers would elect officials who would tax hardworking

Americans to provide services – or shorter hours, or better conditions – for the less affluent voters. "Socialism," southerners argued, had taken root in the south, where it was preventing the economy from rebounding from the war. Northerners looked at the crippled southern economy and listened. They worried that redistributive policies would destroy the nation by undercutting a man's ability to accumulate wealth, and thus his desire to work.

### Fear of an underclass

In the 1870s, a fight to control the Republican Party fed this growing fear of a dangerous underclass.

Elected in 1868, President Ulysses S Grant tried to wrest political power from the senior Republicans who had bested Johnson. They fought back, attacking Grant by charging that his southern governments were deliberately redistributing wealth from hardworking white southerners to lazy ex-slaves in order to garner votes.

Their vitriol was a ploy, but those powerful Republicans controlled most of the nation's newspapers. They insisted federal support for widespread suffrage meant socialism. That accusation spread across the nation and rooted deep in the American psyche.

Ten years after the end of the civil war, the national mood had shifted. No longer were Americans willing to insist that everyone should have a say in the government. In 1875, the Supreme Court decided the suffragist case from 1872. Women were citizens, the court said in the case *Minor versus Happersett*, but citizenship did not convey a right to vote.

This bombshell blessed suffrage restriction. In 1876, white

southerners openly terrorised black voters while northerners railed against politically active urban immigrants. Democrats won the popular vote in the hotly contested presidential election of that year, but Republican Rutherford B Hayes won the Electoral College in part by promising the government would no longer protect black voting.

By 1880, the south was solidly Democratic; it would remain so for almost 100 years. In the north and west too, states began to rewrite their constitutions, once again limiting the right to vote to propertied white men.

In the end, the postwar years did reconstruct a new nation, but not the inclusive world Republicans had envisioned in 1865. Instead, the peculiar mix of racism, citizenship and novel taxation in the postwar years meant that reconstruction created a new mindset in American people: government activism to protect equal rights was socialism, and it would destroy America. **H**

**Heather Cox Richardson**, professor of history at Boston College, is author of *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (YUP, 2007)



An optimistic view of African-American men voting for the first time

## 1870

### 15th Amendment

After the Georgia legislature expels its black members, Congress passes the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing a citizen's right to vote cannot be restricted by race

## 1875

### Minor versus Happersett

The Supreme Court decides that citizenship does not convey the right to vote, effectively denying the vote to women

## 1876

### Election

White Democrats retake control of the South

## 1890 (and beyond)

### Suffrage Restrictions

States across the Union restrict suffrage on grounds other than race, but which nevertheless effectively disenfranchise most blacks





This bronze of General Robert E Lee in Richmond, Virginia, is one of five Confederate statues on Monument Avenue



# THE CIVIL WAR TRAIL:

## visiting the battle sites

Follow in the footsteps of the American Civil War's heroes and victims, as **Aaron Astor** takes us on a modern-day tour of the conflict's most important battle sites, thought-provoking museums and memorials that honour the fallen

**T**HE FIRST CIVIL war tourists were surely the most shocked of all. Picnic-goers from the nation's capital city trekked a mere 30 miles west to the rolling hills near the Manassas railroad junction on a hot July day in 1861, with the hopes of witnessing a summary thrashing of the ragtag rebel army. In the first afternoon of battle all seemed to go well. But then came the famous rally around the 'stone wall' of Thomas Jonathan Jackson and the Confederates at First Bull Run drove the terrified Union soldiers – and their travelling voyeurs – in a panicked race back to Washington.

The macabre scenes of physical destruction, disfigured corpses and hospital tents filled with agonising cries for water, opium or deathly release soon filled the pages of the nation's – and the world's – media. The photographs of Mathew Brady, who extensively documented the civil war, made the tableaux of destruction more visceral – both for horrified contemporaries and for posterity.

### Peace and preservation

Most Americans understandably recoiled from the sites of devastation after the war. Once bucolic places like Sharpsburg, Chancellorsville and Chickamauga attempted to rebury the dead and rebuild communities that had become morbid graves of

amputated limbs and lives. But returning soldiers congregated too – to pay last respects and to reconcile with old enemies on hallowed battle sites. As white northerners and southerners made their peace in the late 19th century, they semi-consciously eschewed all the talk of causes – slavery, treason, race, rights – and consecrated battlefield grounds as pilgrimage destinations. When President Lincoln dedicated the Gettysburg National Cemetery in November 1863 as a site where men fought and died so that a nation "can long endure", he laid the groundwork for generations who returned.

### Macabre scenes filled the pages of the nation's – and the world's – media

But why and how did they return? The reconciliationist spirit led to the creation of battlefield parks, from Gettysburg to Shiloh and myriad places in between. Ageing veterans and then tourists of a new industrial century paid their respects to a bygone age. First, excursion trains then the automobile allowed these remote places to become stops on the national holiday trail.

The war's centennial in the 1960s encouraged millions of new tourists

to visit these respected spaces, even as the contemporary civil rights movement lent new urgency to this 'new birth of freedom'. Meanwhile, relic hunters, kitschy novelty shops and hideous observation towers accompanied the new civil war tourist of post-Second World War America, and re-enactors sought to embody the lives of Johnny Reb and Billy Yank.

### History hunters

The 150th anniversary of the war once again invites the nation and the world to these places of death and renewal. But in the post-civil rights age, tourists want more than regimental troop movements and maps of flanking manoeuvres. As such, national and state parks offer tourists on the civil war trail today a more comprehensive window into the complex conflict. The journey is now far more befitting of a battle that shaped the very identity of the United States and that led to the emancipation of four million African-American slaves.

What follows is a guide to eight worthy touring destinations, divided into the east and west. Some are whole cities and others are remote battlefields. If you visit these places, be sure to explore the communities surrounding them, as the civil war and its legacy continues to define these regions today.





The White House of the Confederacy still stands in Richmond, Virginia

## ➤ THE EAST

### Charleston

It all began here – not just the firing on Fort Sumter but also the secession convention on 20 December 1860. The ferry boat to Fort Sumter in Charleston's harbour is a must, not only for the tour of the fort itself but also for the view of the peninsular city. It's easy to imagine thousands of ships clogging the harbour with cargoes of rice, slaves and indigo.

Take a walk along the battery that guarded homes of the planter elite and you can picture what they saw out there at sea – a world of riches and trade. Behind them, in the interior, lay swampland and a nation whose only useful purpose seemed to be to provide a navy that would protect the wealth wrought by Sea Island slaves. Secession makes more sense when you stand here and realise that the rice planter elite simply did

not feel that they needed the United States of America.

Several sites within the city are critical for the civil war tourist. The Charleston Museum boasts a new gallery on the civil war, filled with local artefacts from the Federal siege of the city, including torpedo mines, secession tables, prosthetic limbs and slave badges. Nearby, Citadel military school is worth a visit: its cadets, manning a battery on Morris Island, fired the first shots of the civil war.

The *Hunley*, one of the world's first submarines, can be viewed at the Warren Lasch Conservation Center. A short drive out of the city and you can see the Boone Hall Plantation in Mount Pleasant, which offers a unique display of the Lowcountry's slave culture and the development of the Gullah – an African-American society in the region.

### Richmond and Petersburg

As the capital city of the south, Richmond, Virginia, was a site of political intrigue, military struggle and churning industry. The Museum of the Confederacy and the preserved White House of the Confederacy stand next to one another in the Court End section of downtown. On display are original uniforms, flags, weapons and other possessions of Confederate leaders, civilians and soldiers. Take a drive down the controversial Monument Avenue to see the statues of Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E Lee. Visit the Tredegar Iron Works to take in a showcase of the industrial works that served as the chief Confederate



DREAMSTIME X3

Where the battle began: start your civil war tour at Fort Sumter, South Carolina – where the first shots were fired



armoury. The museum also reveals the experience of slaves who toiled at the works during the war.

Outside the city are two national battlefield parks worth visiting. The Richmond National Battlefield is where two campaigns – the 1862 Peninsula Campaign and the 1864 overland campaign – were fought. An 80-mile driving tour, recommended at the park, will guide you through most of the important sites. Just 25 miles south is the Petersburg National Battlefield, which preserves the site of the longest siege of the war. At City Point you can learn about General Grant's massive supply base, and in the Eastern Front section of the battlefield you can see the site of the famous battle of the Crater.

## Gettysburg

Your tour would not be complete without visiting the scene of the bloodiest single battle of the entire war: Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. What was once a garish den of tourist traps is now an impressive historical site. A driving tour of the battlefield begins at the Gettysburg National Park's Visitor Center, where you can also admire the relocated 1884 cyclorama of *The Battle of Gettysburg*, a painting by Philippoteaux. Bicycles are a great way to experience the haunting beauty of the site. Popular stops include the Peach Orchard and Wheatfield, the monuments along Cemetery Ridge and Seminary Ridge, Culp's Hill, Devil's Den, and Little Round Top – where Joshua Lawrence



From carnage to calm, Gettysburg National Cemetery is a place of rest for the thousands of soldiers who lost their lives

Chamberlain's defence helped to preserve the entire Federal line.

Also worth visiting is the Gettysburg National Cemetery, which President Lincoln dedicated on 19 November 1863 with his famous Gettysburg Address. Do take in the town itself, which is preserved with quaint shops, bookstores and restaurants. The David Wills House in downtown Gettysburg offers an exhibit on the clean-up after the battle, as the town became one of the largest hospital sites in modern history. Check for special events hosted by the park and by nearby Gettysburg College, whose Civil War Institute offers regular seminars, tours and lectures on various topics relating to the civil war.

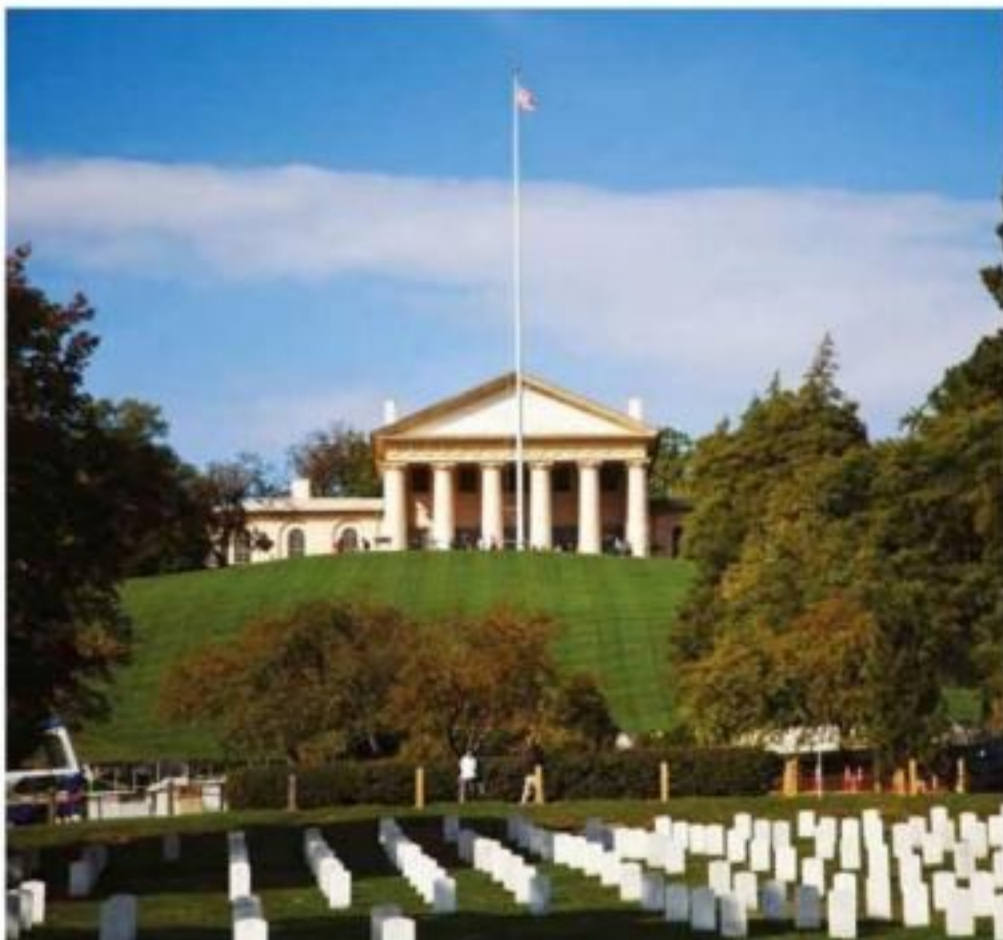
## Washington, DC and North Virginia

The nation's capital was permanently transformed during the civil war from a sleepy southern backwater into a major modern metropolis. The city's streets were quickly occupied by thousands of soldiers guarding the capital. Many of the city's beautiful circles and squares were named after civil war generals, and the iconic

Lincoln Memorial has become a beloved national symbol. There are numerous places in and around the capital that tell the civil war story. First is Ford's Theatre, site of Lincoln's assassination – the balcony of which still brings chills to visitors. The National Building Museum began as one of the world's first dedicated office buildings – designed primarily to administer pensions for Union veterans. Take a tour and witness some of the earliest efforts to design a building that would accommodate handicapped soldiers.

Across the Potomac river is the famous Robert E Lee house at Arlington, now consecrated as the National Cemetery. In Alexandria stands a Confederate soldier statue with his back toward Washington – a reminder that the south loomed so close to the Federal capital.

An hour's drive will take you to three other critical sites. The Manassas National Battlefield (site of two major battles) and the quaint town of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where John Brown's failed slave insurrection in 1859 helped turn a shouting match over slavery into a war. Not far from Harpers Ferry is the beautiful Antietam National Battlefield, site of the most savage single day in American history. ➤



Once home to General Lee, Arlington House is now a memorial





visitors just how important waterway transportation was in the 19th century. Cannons and magazines storing Confederate munitions can be viewed along the bluff, as can the cabins built by slaves to house the Confederate soldiers. Fifteen miles west is Fort Henry on the Tennessee river, which fell just before Donelson. In 1862 it was not effective as it had problems with flooding. Today it lies submerged as the river has been dammed. The Dover Hotel, a restored tavern, is worth a visit. It was here that General Grant accepted the unconditional surrender of General Buckner and 13,000 Confederate soldiers embarked on boats for prison camps in the north.

## Shiloh and Corinth

The best-preserved battlefield is, naturally, one of the most remote. The very name – Shiloh – connotes horror and destruction in a place otherwise defined by natural beauty. On the banks of the Tennessee river near where the states of Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee all meet, lies Shiloh National Battlefield, one of the first to be made into a national park. Visitors should follow the self-guided driving tour and spend hours gazing across the Hornet's Nest, into the Confederate burial trench, along the Pittsburg Landing and around the quaint Shiloh chapel.

Just as intriguing, however, is the town of Corinth, Mississippi, 15 miles south. The railroad crossing at Corinth was the ultimate destination of the Shiloh campaign and the town's Crossroads Museum is well worth a look. However, it's The Civil War Interpretive Center, part of the

# THE WEST

## Fort Donelson

When I take my college students on tours across Tennessee to visit the state's many civil war sites, I make sure to point out that Fort Donelson is the most important battle in the first half of the civil war. Fort Donelson is important for three major reasons: it led directly to the fall of Nashville, the first Confederate state capital to fall; it showcased the

successful Union navy driving into and through the Confederate heartland; and it introduced the world to Ulysses S Grant, whose masterful amphibious attack and call for unconditional surrender made him a Union hero.

Fort Donelson National Park incorporates the Confederate fort along the Cumberland River that fell in February 1862. Barge traffic along the Cumberland river today reminds



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, ALAMY, BATTLEFIELDPORTRAITS.COM

Visit a site of iconic Union victory – General Ulysses S Grant demanded Confederate surrender at Fort Donelson



Find out how runaways slaves survived during the war at Corinth's Contraband Camp



Shiloh National Park, which is the town's main attraction. Its state-of-the-art displays depict the siege of Corinth and the battles in the area. A powerful memorial fountain symbolises the carnage and revolution at the heart of the war. Another highly impressive sight is the newly preserved Corinth Contraband Camp. This is where runaway slaves found refuge in Union lines and the process of emancipation actually unfolded. These sites at Corinth, as well as the charming town itself, are must-see locations on any trip to Shiloh.

## Vicksburg

Upon the surrender of Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 4, 1863, Lincoln remarked, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea." Vicksburg was the Confederate Gibraltar – a mighty fortified town guarding the Mississippi river and refusing to budge for months in the spring and summer of 1863. After several battles to the south and east of the Confederate fortifications, Grant laid siege to the town. It was during this blockade that Vicksburg came to be known as Prairie Dog Village, as the inhabitants survived a cannonade for 47 days by digging out caves in the town's hills. Outside the National Park's visitor centre, tourists should visit the USS *Cairo* Gunboat and Museum, as well as several of the siege locations, including the Federal Navy Circle and the Confederate lines at Louisiana Circle and South Fort. Inside Vicksburg itself, visit the Old Court House museum as well as General Pemberton's Headquarters.

Outside the town is the heartland of Mississippi's famous cotton belt. The moss-covered back roads are worth discovering, as well as the city of Raymond. You'll find a beautiful courthouse square and a walking trail of the battle fought in the months leading up to the final siege of Vicksburg. Head north of Vicksburg and you'll find the site of the battle of Milliken's Bend, one of the most important assaults involving African-American soldiers. Their valour in the fight just one month before the fall of Vicksburg helped protect the Union supply lines and convince Federal authorities that black enlistment should expand.



Get up close to the USS *Cairo* in Vicksburg, Mississippi – she was a formidable ironclad vessel, boasting 13 cannons

## Chattanooga and Chickamauga

As a passageway through the Cumberland mountains, a port on the Tennessee river, and a junction of three different railroads, Chattanooga, Tennessee, was a key gateway to the deep south. Outside the city looms Lookout Mountain, upon which Federal soldiers were victorious in the 'battle above the clouds'.

Begin your visit to the area at Chickamauga, 12 miles south. The two-day battle here in September 1863 was the second deadliest after Gettysburg. Although it was a Confederate victory, Union troops fought bravely under General George 'Rock of Chickamauga' Thomas who organised the rearguard. Be sure to see Snodgrass Hill, where Thomas made his heroic stand, as well as the Visitor Center, which has one of the largest and best 19th-century firearm collections in the world.

After Chickamauga, venture up Lookout mountain for a spectacular view. Visitor information there orients tourists toward sites in Chattanooga. But be sure to drive along Missionary Ridge and imagine Thomas's men charging up the hill toward the Confederate centre. If time permits, head west to the University of the South at Sewanee. The stained glass in its chapel tells the story of efforts to create the Harvard of the Confederacy. **H**

**Aaron Astor PhD** is Associate Professor of History at Maryville College, Tennessee

### FIND OUT MORE

#### ► All National Parks

[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

### THE EAST

#### ► Charleston Museum

[www.charlestonmuseum.org](http://www.charlestonmuseum.org)

#### ► Warren Lasch Conservation Center

[www.hunley.org](http://www.hunley.org)

#### ► Boone Hall Plantation

[www.boonehallplantation.com](http://www.boonehallplantation.com)

#### ► Museum of the Confederacy

[www.moc.org](http://www.moc.org)

#### ► Tredegar Iron Works

[www.tredegar.org](http://www.tredegar.org)

#### ► Gettysburg College, Civil War Institute

[www.gettysburg.edu/cwi/](http://www.gettysburg.edu/cwi/)

#### ► National Building Museum

[www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org)

#### ► Ford's Theatre

[www.fordstheatre.org](http://www.fordstheatre.org)

### THE WEST

#### ► Crossroads Museum

[www.crossroadsmuseum.com](http://www.crossroadsmuseum.com)

#### ► Vicksburg Visitor's Center

[www.oldcourthouse.org](http://www.oldcourthouse.org)

#### ► Lookout Mountain

[www.lookoutmountain.com](http://www.lookoutmountain.com)

#### ► University of the South at Sewanee

[www.sewanee.edu/chapel/visit](http://www.sewanee.edu/chapel/visit)



# THE LEGACY OF THE WAR

The civil war was a key moment in history. It had implications that still reverberate around the world today, argues **James M McPherson**

**T**HE OUTCOME OF the American Civil War resolved two fundamental, festering issues left over from the revolution of 1776. First, whether this fragile republican experiment called the 'United' States would survive as one nation; and second, whether the house divided would continue to endure half slave and half free. Both of these issues remained open questions until 1865.

The founders, the political leaders who established the United States Constitution, were well aware that most republics through the centuries had been swept into the dustbin of history. They were obsessed with the idea their republic might similarly fail, and they had reason to be worried. From the early years of the nation, certain Americans had advocated the right of secession. In 1860–61, 11 states did invoke it in response to the election of Lincoln as president, thus breaking the country in two and creating a potentially fatal precedent for future secessions whenever a minority did not like the results of an election.

At the cost of what is now estimated to have been 750,000 lives, the American republic survived as one nation. Despite occasional mutterings, no state or region has seriously threatened secession since 1865.

The acceptance of majority rule has become the bedrock of national unity.

By the middle of the 19th century, the United States, founded more than half a century earlier on a charter that declared all men created equal, had become the largest slaveholding country in the world, making a mockery of America's self-image as a beacon of freedom for oppressed peoples.

As Lincoln said in 1854, "The monstrous injustice of slavery... deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world – enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites." With the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, slavery's era passed,

## Without the civil war and its results, America would be a very different place today

even if its legacy in the form of racial discrimination and prejudice has long plagued the United States.

Nevertheless, the three constitutional amendments that grew directly out of the civil war have profoundly reshaped the American polity and continue to affect the social and political landscape in our time. The Fourteenth Amendment – granting citizenship to all persons born in the United States, and forbidding states to abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens or to deny any person the equal protection of the laws – has helped to transform the status of racial and ethnic minorities, women and those persecuted for their sexuality. The Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting racial discrimination in voting, empowered minority groups and prepared the ground

for the election of the country's first African-American president. Much of this, arguably, would not have been possible without the civil war and its consequences.

In another and less tangible way, the war altered the direction of American development and even the course of world history in the 20th century. Before 1861, two socioeconomic and cultural systems competed for dominance within the body politic of the United States. Although in retrospect the triumph of industrial capitalism over plantation agriculture seems to have been inevitable, that was by no means clear before 1861.

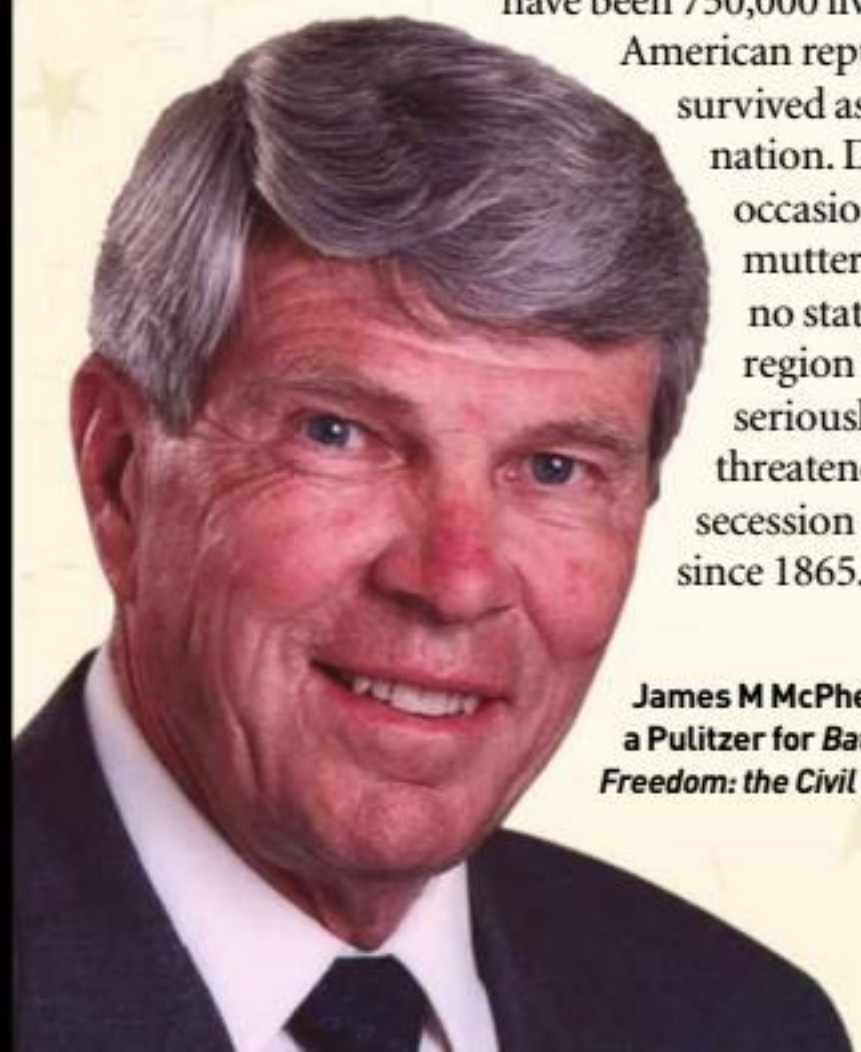
Most of the slave states seceded that year not only because they feared the potential threat to the long-term survival of slavery posed by Lincoln's election, but also because they looked forward to the expansion of a dynamic, independent slaveholding nation by the acquisition of Cuba and perhaps more of Mexico and Central America.

If the Confederacy had prevailed in the 1860s, it is possible that the United States would not have emerged as the world's leading economic power by the end of the 19th century, or as its most powerful nation by the second half of the 20th century.

The United States today is a multicultural society made up of many different regional, ethnic, religious and racial groups, all blended together in one nation under a single national flag. Both the diversity of social groups and the unity of the national polity are a legacy of the civil war. Without that war and its results, America would be a very different place today. **H**

**James M McPherson** is George Henry Davis 1886 Professor of American History, Emeritus, at Princeton University

DAVID K. CROW



James M McPherson won a Pulitzer for *Battle Cry of Freedom: the Civil War Era*

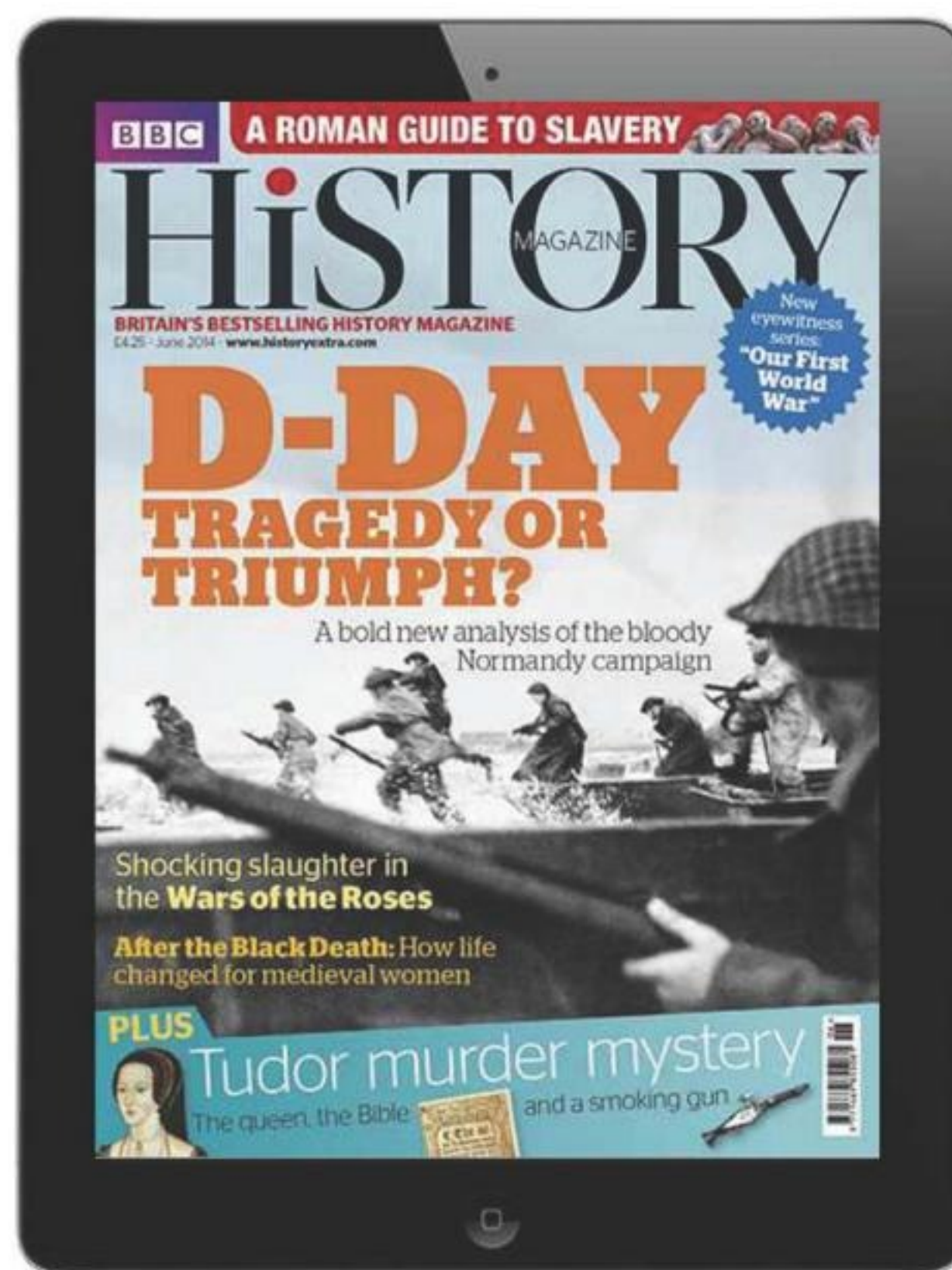


# BBC History Magazine is now available on iPad



You can now read all the great content from Britain's bestselling history magazine on your iPad – combining our printed editions with the pick of our digital offerings.

A **12-month subscription** to the *BBC History Magazine* iPad edition is just £37.99, while a **six-month subscription** will cost you just £18.99. **Single issues** can also be purchased for £3.99 each.



**BBC** **HiSTORY**  
MAGAZINE

Search: BBC History



Available on the  
**App Store**



A stylized graphic of the American flag, featuring a field of white stars on a dark blue background in the upper left, and red and white stripes on the right, all set against a white background.

*“This fresh portrayal of the American Civil War offers stimulating accounts from varying perspectives that beginners and experts alike will find informative. Highly recommended.”*

**James M McPherson PhD,**  
Professor Emeritus of American History at Princeton University

**IMMEDIATE  
MEDIA<sup>CO</sup>**